THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/mohawksnovel02brad

MOHAWKS

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN,"
"ISHMAEL,"

ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON
JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL
MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET
AND
ST. BRIDE STREET, LUDGATE CIRCUS, E.C.

[*All rights reserved*]

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SONS, LIMITED, PRINTERS, PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.

PR
4989
M33 m
v.2

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	"IN OPPOSITION AGAINST FATE AND HELL" .	1
II.	"I STAND UPON THE GROUND OF MINE OWN HONOUR"	22
III.	"THEY WERE BORN POOR, LIVED POOR, AND POOR THEY DIED"	39
IV.	"YOU STOP MY TONGUE, AND TEACH MY HEART TO SPEAK	75
V.	"AND IN SUCH CHOICE SHALL STAND MY WEALTH AND WOE"	90
VI.	"THE LADIES THERE MUST NEEDS BE ROOKS" .	113
VII.	"IN PLAYHOUSE AND IN PARK ABOVE THE REST"	141
VIII.	"YET STILL I AM IN LOVE, AND PLEASED WITH RUIN"	184
IX.	"AND, LO! MY WORLD IS BANKRUPT OF DELIGHT"	210
X.	"FORGET, RENOUNCE ME, HATE WHATE'ER WAS MINE"	224
XI.	"AND WE SHALL FADE, AND LEAVE OUR TASK UNDONE"	242
XII.	"BY FOREIGN HANDS THY DYING EYES WERE CLOSED"	269

555C76

MOHAWKS

CHAPTER I.

"IN OPPOSITION AGAINST FATE AND HELL."

"HERRICK," said Lavendale suddenly next day, when the two friends were alone together in the Abbey hall, a spacious chamber, half armoury, half picture-gallery, rich alike in the damascened steel of Damascus and Toledo and in the angular saints and virgins of the early Italian painters; "Herrick, you are making love to my heiress; you are cutting off my advance to El Dorado; you are playing the part of a traitor."

"'Tis a true bill, Jack. I confess my crime, my treachery—what you will. I adore Irene Bosworth, for whom you care not a straw. I should love her as fondly were she a beggar-girl that I had

found by the roadside—'tis for herself I love her, and for no meaner reason. I loved her before you ever saw her face."

"Ho, ho! how secret you can be!"

"There are some things too holy to be canvassed with one who is seldom serious. Had I told you of my passion, you would have laughed at the love and the lover. I met that sweet girl in the wood one morning, met her again the next, adored her in the first hour we met, and went on loving her deeper with every meeting. And then you came home with your story of an heiress, and strutted like a peacock before her, irresistible, all-conquering, deeming it impossible that any other man could be loved while you were by. Was I to warn you of my silent rivalry? It is but within the last week I have told her of my love."

"And does she return it?"

"She tells me as much."

"Then, by Heaven, Herrick, I will not cross your loves. For no joining of lands and bettering of my estate will I be false at once to love and friendship. If Mr. Bosworth has a mind to extend his

property, he can wait till I am dead and buy Lavendale Manor from the Jews. I doubt it will be deeply dipped by that time."

"Why talk of death in the flush of health and vigour?"

"Flushes are deceitful, Herrick; there is a kind of bloom that augurs more evil than Lord Hervey's sickly pallor, though I doubt if he prove long-lived. A short life and a merry one has ever been my motto. No, friend, I will not cross you; and if I can help your suit, I will."

"You may help me to some kind of preferment which may help my suit, if you have a mind."

"What, in the Church? Would you turn literary parson, like the Irish dean?"

"No; I have been too much a student of Toland and Tyndal to make a good priest. I want you to help me to the first vacant seat in which you have an interest. I believe I could be of some use to the Whigs."

"Then I will move heaven and earth to get you elected whenever the chance arises. Yes, you are a glorious speaker. I remember how you startled the

infidels at the Hell Fire Club when you rose in your strength one midnight, and thundered out a peal of orthodoxy which would have done honour to a High Church bishop; not Tillotson himself, that orthodox bully, as Bolingbroke called him, could have been more eloquent. Yes, I will help you, Herrick, if I can. There's my hand upon it."

"You were ever generous," said his friend gravely, as they shook hands; "but, alas, I fear you would hardly give up your heiress-hunt so readily if—"

"If I had not another quarry in view, eh, Herrick?" interrupted Lavendale, with that kind of feverish gaiety which in his nature alternated with periods of deep despondency. "Well, perhaps you are right, old friend. I am not a practised schemer, and can hardly hide my cards from one so familiar as my Herrick."

"Jack, I am afraid you are going to the devil."

"True, lad, and have been travelling on that journey for the last five years; ever since the Chichinette business. I might have pulled up just then, Herrick. I was tired of my old follies, sick to

death of all our extravagances, smoking porters, breaking windows, beating watchmen, cock-pit and bear-garden, dicing and drinking. I meant to become a better man, and Judith Walberton's husband. But Wharton and his gang jeered at my reformation—twitted and taunted and teased and exasperated me into a braggadocio wager, and I lost her who should have been my redeeming angel."

"Nay, Jack, methinks that lady was never so angelic as you deemed her, and that she has too much of Lucifer's pride to rank with seraphs that have not fallen. She is a fine creature, but a dangerous friend for you; and you are a fatal companion for her. In a word, you ought not to be in this house. The same roof should not shelter you and Lady Judith."

"Grateful, after I have brought you here to play the traitor and court my mistress—vastly grateful, after I have surrendered the lady and her fortune!"

"Dear Jack, I was never your flatterer—should I flatter when I see you on the road to perdition?"

"What matter, if it be the only way to happiness? O, for some occult power by which I could read and

rule the thoughts of her I love! There are moments when I fancy that I do so rule her—that I can creep into her heart, stir her bosom with the same fire that thrills my own, transfer every thought of my brain to hers. Our eyes have met in such moments —met across the babble and folly of the crowd, and I have known that we were reading each other's mind as plainly as in an open book. And then came that sleek profligate Bolingbroke, with his false handsome face and honeyed tongue, and her vanity or her caprice was at once engaged. Pleasant to have so great a man in leading-strings. She would as readily take fox-hunting, heavy-jowled, beef-eating Walpole for her flirt. She is made up of extravagance and vanity."

"She is a woman of fashion. What else would you have her but vain and extravagant? They are all cast in the same mould. Vanity, extravagance, and coquetry in youth; envy, malice, white lead, and ratafia in age. Believe me, Jack, thou hadst best go back to town!"

"Why, so I will, Herrick, when the *Craftsman* goes. They tell me that is the name of the new

paper which Bolingbroke and Pulteney are plotting. I will not leave Henry St. John master of the field."

"He is old enough to be her father."

"He is handsome enough and seductive enough to be her lover. I swear I will not leave him on the ground. Ah, here comes our dilettante host, with his usual semiquaver and diminished-seventh air."

"What, gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Topsparkle, "is it possible two Englishmen can spend a morning without cock-fighting, donkey-racing, or some other equally national entertainment? Do you know that there are races at Stockbridge to-day, and that most of my friends have gone off on horseback or in coaches to see the sport? Shall I order another coach for you two?"

"I am profoundly obliged for the offer," said Lavendale, "but I had enough of horse-racing when I was in my teens. I contrived to lose a small fortune and exhaust the pleasures of the Turf before my majority. I have not the staying power of my Lord Godolphin, who frequented the racecourse to his dying day. But I could suggest an amusement, Mr.

Topsparkle, if you have a spare half-hour to bestow upon me."

"All my hours are at your lordship's service."

"You are vastly kind. My friend Durnford and I are both burning with impatience to see your library—that is to say, those choicer books which are not shown to the outer world, the crypto-jewels of your collection."

"I shall be delighted to exhibit those gems to such fine judges. I always think of a rare book or curio as if it were a living thing, and could feel a slight. To an appreciative friend I am ever charmed to unlock my choicest cases: those in my own study, for instance, where I keep my private collection. Will you walk that way? I have been spending a wearisome hour there with my land-steward, and your presence will be an agreeable relief."

Lavendale and Durnford followed their host along a corridor to the further end of the house, where there was a spacious room fronting the south, but shaded by the old Gothic cloister upon which the windows opened. There was a glass door also opening into the cloister, and here on sunny mornings, and sometimes even in rainy weather, Mr. Top-

sparkle walked up and down, sometimes with a book, sometimes in meditative solitude.

The room was handsome and picturesque: the bookcases which lined the walls on all sides were of richly carved oak—the spoils of Flemish churches, the wreckage of old choir-stalls and demolished pulpits. The ceiling was also of oak, heavily bossed. The floor was polished oak, covered in part by a large Oriental carpet. Mr. Topsparkle had not been quite such a Goth as that Lord Westmoreland who built a Grecian front to one side of a fine old cloistered court at Apethorpe; but his taste was of the rococo order, and he had not altogether spared the monastic building which caprice, rather than veneration for antiquity, had tempted him to buy. He had built out an alcove at one end of the room, and had lighted it with painted windows from the wreck of an Italian palace—a patch of renaissance art stuck like a wen upon a purely mediæval building. This alcove Mr. Topsparkle loved better than any other part of his house. It was his own secret cell, in which he delighted to read or meditate, write letters, or survey his financial position, alone or

with the attendance of his man of business. Rich as he was, Mr. Topsparkle was not above making more money. He had his dabblings and speculations on 'Change, and was, like Roland Bosworth, in advance of his contemporaries in clearness of insight and breadth of view.

To-day the appearance of this alcove indicated that he had lately been at work there. A large old-fashioned Dutch bureau stood open, the secrétaire littered with papers. It was a wondrous old piece of furniture which filled one side of the recess. The double doors were richly ornamented with the story of the Crucifixion and Entombment carved in high relief. These doors stood open, and the light from the painted window on the opposite side of the recess shone with prismatic hues upon the writing-desk, with its scattered papers and innumerable drawers and pigeon-holes.

"I fear we are intruders here at an awkward time, Mr. Topsparkle," said Lavendale, noting that appearance of recent occupation.

"No, upon my veracity. I have dismissed my man of business; I mean to work no more to-day."

"Hard that Crœsus should have to labour," said Herrick lightly.

"My dear Durnford, be assured that if Crœsus was as rich as we are told, he had been obliged to toil in the maintenance of his fortune, to look to the collection of king's taxes, and see that his people did not plunder him. 'Tis almost as hard labour to keep a fortune as to win one, and I doubt if any man is as happy as the miser who keeps his money in a hole under his pallet, and counts it every night. That, for pure enjoyment, is your true use of money. But let me show you my books."

He unlocked a case and displayed some of his treasures,—curious books in all languages, from classic Greek to modern French; from Anacreon to the author of the "Philippiques," those terrible lampoons upon the late Regent, published but a few years earlier in Paris. They were strange and unholy books some of them, the possession of which could not give any man the slightest pleasure, were it not the foolish pride of owning something rare and costly and unparalleled in wickedness. Mr. Topsparkle was intensely proud of them.

"You could never imagine the pains it has cost me to collect these rarities," he said, "and upon my soul I know not if they are worth having. 'Tis like those dulcimers in the music-room which belonged to Marguerite of Valois—Clément Marot's Marguerite, you understand—and for which I gave a small fortune to a Jew dealer in Paris. What do you want, man, that you stand staring there?"

This abrupt question was addressed to a footman, who stood statue-like, just within the doorway, as if he dared not approach nearer his master's august presence. He had murmured some communication which had been unheard.

"Sir, my Lord Bolingbroke is in the billiard-room, and begs particularly for a few minutes' speech with you. He will not detain you longer. He has had some news from London which he would like to tell you."

"Tell his lordship I will be with him instantly. If you will excuse my brief absence, gentlemen? The books may amuse you while I am gone, but my choicest gems are yet to be shown. Or if you would like to defer to another morning—" he added, with

an uneasy glance towards the alcove, which Lavendale was too preoccupied to perceive.

"No, no, my dear sir, we will wait for your return. There are books and pictures and curios here to amuse us for a week."

"I'll not be long," said Topsparkle, hurrying away.

The two young men strolled about the room, in which there was indeed plenty to interest and enchain the connoisseur in art-curiosities. Bronzes, medallions, coins, porcelain, loaded the tables, and adorned every available inch of space which was not filled by the books. The collector's passion for amassing specimens of every art and every school was exhibited in its fullest development.

Lord Lavendale came presently to the alcove. It was curtained off at times from the rest of the room by a fine old piece of Indian embroidery, a thick and heavy fabric in which gems of all kinds were embedded upon a ground of silken brocade mingled with a curious golden tissue. Lavendale and Durnford admired the curtain, which was drawn back to about a third of the opening, and then his

lordship's quick glance lighted on the old oak cabinet.

"It is a shrine," he cried, "the back portion of an old Dutch altar, I take it, with some rare old picture for the reredos. That central panel is a door with a picture behind it. Did you ever see finer carving?"

"These doors are magnificent," said Durnford, looking at the two outer doors which had been flung back.

"Yes, the carving there is bold and spirited, but this is finer work. Here is the story of the Nativity, and the four kings with their offerings—the manger and the three beasts. You remember the old legend—how the ass brayed *eamus*, and the ox answered in his deep bass roar, *ubi*, and the lamb ba-ad 'Bethlehem.' Yes, here is the Virgin, and the humble cradle of Divinity."

"Let us see the picture behind the panel, if there is one. A Vandyke, perhaps," suggested Durnford. "Look, there is a key."

He pointed to a very small key in the outer

moulding which framed the storied panel. Lavendale turned the key and drew back the door.

"My God!" cried Durnford; "Irene's portrait!"

It was no Vandyke—no sad and solemn picture of the Crucifixion, or the Descent from the Cross, no pale divine head with its coronal of thorns. It was only a woman's face, beautiful exceedingly, with golden-brown hair, and dark violet eyes under black lashes; a pale, sweet, almost perfect face, and the image of Irene Bosworth. And yet it was not Irene's portrait. A more deliberate inspection showed points of difference in the two faces. There was a startling resemblance, but not identity.

"What, you have discovered another of my secret treasures?" asked a soft and legato voice at Lavendale's elbow.

It was Mr. Topsparkle, who had reëntered the room so quietly that neither of his guests had been aware of his approach. He was paler than usual under his paint, and had a somewhat troubled air, Durnford thought; but if he were vexed at finding them before the hidden picture, he gave no utterance to his vexation.

"A very beautiful head and very tolerably painted, eh, gentlemen?" he asked lightly.

"A lovely head and very finely painted," replied Lavendale; "but there is something that strikes me more forcibly than the beauty of the face or the skill of the painter." He looked fixedly at Mr. Topsparkle as he spoke.

"Indeed! And pray what is that?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No, upon my honour."

"The very remarkable likeness between that head and Mrs. Irene Bosworth."

Mr. Topsparkle put on his eyeglasses, and scrutinised the picture almost as if it were the first time of seeing it. While he looked, Lavendale was also looking, and his keen eye discovered the painter's signature, Paulo Villari; Venice, 1686.

"Your lordship is right," said Mr. Topsparkle, after a lengthy inspection. "There is certainly a something in outline and feature—and even in expression—which resembles Mrs. Bosworth. Strange that I should not have perceived it before; but although I write at this cabinet nearly every day,

I very seldom open yonder door. I bought the picture in Italy so many years ago that I would, if possible, forget the date of the purchase."

"Did you know the original? It is obviously a portrait."

"Yes, I believe it was the portrait or a study of a very handsome model—the Fornarina of some young painter who never became as famous as Raffaelle. No, I did not know the lady. Those chance likenesses are very curious. I have half a mind to make Mrs. Bosworth a present of the picture—and yet I could hardly bring myself to rob this old cabinet of even a hidden treasure. You have been admiring the carving, I hope. It is the finest I ever discovered in nearly half a century of curio-hunting."

"Yes, it is exquisite," Lavendale answered absently.

He had been thinking of the date of the picture, and the place where it was painted. There was no doubt in his mind that this was the portrait of Topsparkle's Italian mistress, the unfortunate lady who had died mysteriously at the house in Soho

Square. Topsparkle's pale and troubled look suggested the darkest memories.

The likeness to Irene was of course only a coincidence. Such chance resemblances are common enough. Yes, the face was a lovely one; and this was the face which John Churchill had admired in his dawn of manhood, he himself beautiful as a Greek god, full of strength and genius, a born leader and captain of men, a man of whom it was justly said that since the days of Alexander there had been no greater soldier.

Topsparkle closed and locked the door upon the picture, and put the key in his pocket.

"And pray what was his lordship's news, Mr. Topsparkle?" asked Durnford. "If it be not secret news, which it were an impertinence to ask."

"It is news all Europe must know before the week is out," answered Topsparkle, "although it reaches Bolingbroke by a private hand. He has correspondents all over the Continent, and is ever *au courant*."

"Your news, Mr. Topsparkle!" cried Lavendale. "Do not dally with our impatience. Has the

Pretender landed on the rugged Scottish coast? Is Gibraltar taken?"

"No; 'tis but one unlucky old woman less in the world, one poor feeble light extinguished. Sophia of Zell, she who should have been Queen of England —the Electress Dowager of Hanover they call her— has died in her prison-house at Ahlen, and his lordship's informant tells him a curious story of her death-bed."

"Prithee, let us have it. I have a morbid passion for death-bed stories."

"'Tis said that in her last hour, after a long interval of silence and seeming unconsciousness, the dying woman lifted herself up suddenly in her bed, and in a firm clear voice called upon the spirit of her cruel husband to meet her before the judgment-seat within a year. Those round her were as scared as if they had seen a ghost from the grave. She lived but to speak those words, and fell back expiring with that summons on her lips."

"I do not envy his Majesty's feelings should he be told of that invitation," said Lavendale. "Whatever his virtues as a king, as a husband he has been

pitiless. Never was girlish indiscretion atoned by so terrible an expiation as that living death of thirty desolate years. 'Tis a dastardly story."

"'Twas not altogether his fault. 'Twas his father's mistress, the Countess of Platen, who was at the root of the mischief. 'Twas she who set her spies upon the young Princess, and murdered Königsmark. 'Twas said the fury stamped her heel upon his face as he lay dying."

"The rage of slighted beauty has various ways of showing itself," said Durnford. "But if George as a young man was led into cruelty and injustice by others, his riper age might have inclined to mercy, and were it but for the sake of his daughter, Queen Sophia of Prussia, he should have had compassion upon his wife."

"I have heard the Prince's friends say that should his mother survive her tyrant, 'twas his design to restore her to honour and her title of Queen Dowager; but whatever good intentions his Royal Highness may have entertained on her account are now cut short by death."

"I believe he only gave out such an intention to

tease his father," said Topsparkle. "There is an hereditary hatred between the fathers and sons of that house. Here is Prince Frederick, for instance, kept out of England, and frankly detested by both parents."

"Were George wise he would marry his grandson out of hand to his cousin the Princess Wilhelmina, and so fulfil one-half of the Quadruple Alliance. Frederick William is an unmannerly brute, and a miser withal; but he has a long head, and Prussia is steadily rising in the scale of power. England should buckle herself to that nation by every link possible."

CHAPTER II.

"I STAND UPON THE GROUND OF MINE OWN HONOUR."

LAVENDALE left Ringwood Abbey more than ever in love with his former mistress, and savagely jealous of her other admirers, from Bolingbroke downwards. But it was against her husband that his hatred was deadliest. Those dark stories of Mr. Topsparkle's youth and ripening years had taken a strong grip upon Lavendale's mind. He had been a profligate himself, and his own wild youth gave him but little justification for setting up as a moralist; but Lavendale's sins had been the vices of an accomplished gentleman, sunning his follies in the full blaze of notoriety, parading his amours, his gambling adventures and duels, advertising all his laxities of conduct and opinion, glorying in his shame; while Topsparkle's vices had been dark and secret, obscure as the rites of an antique religion, only guessed at dimly by the multitude.

To Lavendale the very presence of the man inspired loathing, albeit Mr. Topsparkle was generally esteemed a very pretty fellow, and a wonder of careful preservation and artistic treatment.

"By lamplight our dear Topsparkle might pass for forty-five," said Bolingbroke, discussing his late host at White's one evening after the opera, "and yet I have reason to know that he is nearer seventy than sixty—and upon my soul, gentlemen, it is a very meritorious thing for a man of seventy to pass for young. 'Tis not so easy as you young gentlemen think."

"There is a quiet elegance about Topsparkle which is very taking," said Mr. Chevenix, a prosperous barrister; "and when one remembers that his father made his money in the City, and that he is only one generation removed from hides and tallow—"

"There you are mistaken, my dear Chevenix," interposed Asterley; "the elder Topsparkle was a drysalter."

"And pray does not that mean hides and tallow? I thought they were all one," said Chevenix, with a languid fine-gentleman air.

"Alderman Topsparkle was a very clever fellow," said Bolingbroke. "You are not to suppose that he made his vast fortune all in the beaten way of trade, out of pickles and saltpetre. 'Tis said he speculated largely on 'Change; and it is also said that before the Peace of Utrecht he used to buy up all the spoiled gunpowder in the country and sell it again to a very great man, whose name I would be the last to mention for two good reasons. He is dead; and he was once my friend."

"Nothing like a long war for enriching clever tradesmen," said Chevenix. "Now, I really think it very estimable in Topsparkle, considering his low origin, that he manages to pass for almost a gentleman."

"I know he is much genteeler than many of us, and far more courteous," said Bolingbroke.

"Ah, that is his chief mistake. He overdoes the courtly air. He is monotonous in his gentility, and has none of the easy variety which belongs to high breeding. He has all the faults of a novice in the art of good manners."

That refined air and superficial polish, which satis-

fied society at large, revolted Lord Lavendale. He hated mincing manners in any man, but most of all in Vyvyan Topsparkle. He hated the man's small white hands and smooth feminine tones of voice, hated his pencilled eyebrows and white-lead complexion, his slim waist and attenuated legs.

He told himself that this aversion of his was but a natural instinct, an innate revulsion of the mind at the aspect of hidden sin; yet in his heart of hearts it was as Judith's husband he hated this man. He thought of him as her owner, the wretch who had bought her with his fortune, who held her captive by the malignant power of his ill-gotten wealth—who in the privacy of domestic life might insult and bully her, for anything Lavendale knew to the contrary. That smooth Janus countenance had doubtless its darker side; and he who in public was ever the adoring husband might be a tyrant in private.

Stimulated by this ill-feeling, Lavendale was more than ever bent on ferreting out the secret of Mr. Topsparkle's early life, and the fate of that Italian mistress whom he had for a little while acknowledged as his wife. He had exhausted all his own and

Philter's powers of research, and had come by no proof or even circumstantial evidence of guilt. There was but one person likely to know all Mr. Topsparkle's secrets, and he would be unlikely to reveal them. That person was Fétis, the confidential valet, whom Lavendale had met sometimes in the corridors at Ringwood Abbey, looking the very essence of discretion and respectful dumbness.

"Difficult to get a man to speak when all his interests are in favour of silence," thought Lavendale.

He communicated his perplexities to his friend Durnford. Since his lordship's renunciation of Irene they were more brotherly together than ever they had been.

"And I, too, am devoured with curiosity about Topsparkle's past life," said Herrick; "that hidden picture with its strange likeness to the girl I love has mystified me consumedly. 'Tis but a chance likeness, of course, since we can trace Irene's lineage into the remote past without coming upon any track of an Italian marriage. I have examined the Bosworth family-tree—you must have noticed it framed and

glazed in the dining-parlour—and there is not a foreign twig in all its ramifications. Yet when I ponder on my dear one's passion for music, her ardent impulsive temperament, her southern style of beauty, I am at a loss to comprehend how that sober British tree can have put forth so bright a flower. In any case I should like to know more about that lovely girl whose picture is hidden in Mr. Topsparkle's sanctum. By his pallor when he caught us looking at the portrait, one might guess he has painful memories of the original."

Lady Tredgold carried her niece back to London, and Irene reëntered the glittering circle of fashion and folly, and mixed with women among whom high principles and virtuous inclinations were as exceptional as the Pitt diamond among gems. The rage for play had spread like a leprous taint through the whole fabric of society. Women sat night after night squabbling over cards, and were ready to stab each other with the golden bodkins they wore in their hair, if Spadillio was unkind, or Manillio in the hand of an adversary. Lady Tredgold was an inveterate game-

ster, but dared not play high, and was fain to affect the society of ladies of limited means, who could only afford to ruin themselves and their families in a small way. Yet if her losses were not large, her temper suffered as severely as if she had been losing thousands; while she was careful not to parade her winnings before her lean and hard-featured daughters, who had something of the harpy in their natures, and were always pestering their mother for new clothes or pocket-money. They, too, were fond of cards, despite the awful example furnished by their parent; they, too, had their losses, which had to be supplied somehow. Card-money was in those days a necessity of fashionable existence. Better to be buried alive in some rustic vicarage, combing lap-dogs and reading Mrs. Behn or Mrs. Manly, than to be launched in a London drawing-room with an empty purse.

Rena, whose purse was always full, declined to play, whereupon she was characterised as cold and proud and witless, a beautiful nonentity, a woman altogether wanting in spirit.

"You should gamble, child; 'tis the only excite-

ment in life," said Lady Judith, tapping the heiress on the cheek at a fine house in Gerard Street, where the tables were set for ombre and basset.

"It is an excitement that seems to make nobody happy, madam," answered Rena quietly. "So I would as soon be dull."

"What a prude your heiress is!" Judith said to Lavendale, a few minutes after: "she glides about a room looking as if she were a being of superior mould, and had nothing in common with mortals."

"She is but a child just escaped from the nursery," answered Lavendale lightly, "and doubtless her soul is overwhelmed with wonder."

"Nay, I would not mind if she were shy and abashed among us," retorted Judith, "for I admit that we are somewhat startling to a novice. It is her impertinent assurance which annoys me. That calm half-unconscious air of superiority would provoke a saint."

"If there were any saints in our set to be provoked," said Lavendale; "but I don't think there is anything saintly to be met with in a West End card-room."

"Look at her now, as she stands with her elbow leaning on yonder mantelpiece, not deigning even to pretend to listen to Mr. Dapperwit's compliments. I wonder, for my part, that he wastes his cleverness upon a creature of ice. Where did she get that cold impregnable air?"

"From the gods, whose daughter she should be, if looks could vouch for a pedigree," answered Lavendale, delighted to tease the woman he adored.

"O, I beg your lordship's pardon," said Judith, with a curtsy. "I forgot for the moment that I was criticising the future Lady Lavendale."

"Don't apologise. We are not plighted yet, and that impregnable air of Mrs. Bosworth may keep me off as well as her other lovers."

"What, are you not engaged yet?"

"No, nor ever likely to be, Judith, as you know very well."

They were in a doorway between a secondary drawing-room and a third room still smaller—jostled and hemmed in by the crowd. He could snatch her hand and clasp it for a moment unperceived. Their eyes met as the crowd drifted them nearer, met in

fond entanglement, and Judith's alabaster bosom glowed with a sudden blush like the crimson light of a winter dawn reflected upon snow. It was but an instantaneous betrayal of passionate feeling on either side; yet from that moment the possibility of pretence or concealment was over. Each knew that the old fires still burned. Light words and lighter laughter and all the studied arts of coquetry could henceforward avail nothing.

The crowd which had drifted them together speedily jostled them apart; Lady Judith passed on in a bevy of fashion and chatter, talking as loud as her friends, and with just as much elegant inanity.

Everybody decided that evening that Irene was dull. A pity that so much beauty and wealth should be thrown away upon a simpleton. She had not even that hoydenish audacity, that knack of saying improper things innocently, which could alone make simplicity interesting to well-bred people. She was not in the least amusing. She was only beautiful: and one might say as much of a statue.

Irene looked with dreamy eyes upon that strange and brilliant crowd, caring very little what anybody

thought of her. Already she was tired of that gay world which had dazzled her so at first: or rather it seemed only fair to her when her lover was near. When Herrick came into one of those crowded rooms —approaching her suddenly, perhaps, and unawares —her eyes shone out like twin stars. But if he were not there, all was dull and dreary, and the company seemed to her no better than an assemblage of grimacing puppets, moving on wires. She liked Lord Lavendale because he was Herrick's friend, and she always brightened when she talked to him, a fact which Judith's keen eye had noted.

It was not always that Herrick received a card for the assemblies to which Lady Tredgold and her girls were bidden. He was too proud to go into society as Lavendale's satellite, so he only frequented those houses where he was asked on his own account as a young man of parts and much promise; and it was in the best houses that he was oftenest seen. His letters in the Whig journals had attracted attention, and his talent shone out all the more conspicuously because most of the best writers had gone over to the Opposition, disgusted by Walpole's neglect of lite-

rature. His name was becoming familiar among the ranks of journalists ; but journalism was then in its infancy, and was but poorly paid, while the writers of books, unless the book was as famous as *Gulliver's Travels* or Pope's *Iliad*, might count upon years of toil and privation before they attained even a competence.

Herrick's outlook, therefore, was far from hopeful, and he delayed the avowal of his passion to Irene's father with a hesitation which he himself denounced as cowardly.

He felt that love once avowed, hands and hearts pledged for life, there should be no more secrecy. Concealment was a dishonour to his innocent mistress.

"I must beard the lion," he said to himself; "come the worst, I can but steal her by a Mayfair marriage. He can never lock her up so close, or carry her so far away, or hide her so cunningly that love would not follow and find her. I will at least give him the chance of acting generously."

So one morning, in cold blood, Mr. Durnford waited upon Squire Bosworth at his lodgings in

Arlington Street, at an hour when he knew, by private information obtained from Irene over-night, that the gentleman would be at home.

He was shown into a parlour where Mr. Bosworth was drinking chocolate and reading the *St. James's Weekly Journal*, a Tory paper; for he was still at heart attached to the exiled family, although self-interest and the Stock Exchange made him a zealous adherent to Walpole. To that great financier he could not refuse his allegiance.

He received Herrick with a cold civility which was not encouraging. Lady Tredgold had hinted her suspicions about Durnford, and put the Squire on his guard.

"Can I do anything in the City for you, sir?" asked Bosworth; "I should be glad to oblige any friend of my friend Lord Lavendale."

"Nothing, sir, unless you could put me up to some trick of winning a fortune suddenly, without any capital to speculate with. But I take it that it is beyond even your power, and I must trust such poor talents as I may possess, backed by industry, to make my way in the world. Mr. Bosworth, it is ill

beating about the bush when a man has a weak cause to advocate. In four words, sir, I love your daughter."

"Indeed, sir! You are vastly civil and mightily candid. And may I ask do you design to maintain Mrs. Bosworth by your pen, as a political pamphleteer, and to lodge her in a three-pair back in Grub Street?"

"I think we could both be happy, sir, even in a garret, with no better view than the chimney-stacks, and no better fare than bread and cheese."

"What, sir! you have dared to steal my daughter's heart—you, an arrant pauper?"

"There was no stealing, Mr. Bosworth. Our hearts came together unawares—flew towards each other like two young birds on St. Valentine's Day. Let me have her, sir, because she loves me, and because there is no other man on this earth who can ever love her more truly than I do. Forget that she is a great fortune, and remember that if I am poor I am well-born, and that the world says I am not without ability. The arena of public life is open to all comers. Lavendale has promised me his interest at

the next election. In the House of Commons I should be at least a gentleman—"

"You are not there, sir, yet. Why, you talk as if you were a Pelham, and had but to ask and have! Let there be no more fooling between us, I beg. I don't want to lose my temper if I can help it. My daughter *is* a great fortune, as well as a very handsome girl, and I mean her to marry either rank or wealth. I want the fortune which I have made—slowly, laboriously in part, and in part by sudden strokes of luck—to remain behind me as an enduring monument when I am dust. I want the security of a great name and a large landed estate. I can afford to buy them both, and my daughter is handsome enough to marry well, were she only a milkmaid. I have been disposed to look kindly on Lavendale, because our estates join; but his fortune is shattered, his reputation is bad, and his title a paltry one. Such a girl as mine should mate with a duke, and could I find a respectable duke a bachelor, I would offer her to him. These are my views, Mr. Durnford. You have been candid with me, and I am pleased to reciprocate your candour."

"You give me no hope, sir?"

"None. And mark you, sir, you may think it a clever thing to run away with my daughter, as Wortley Montagu did with the Duke of Kingston's girl. Remember that in such a case your wife will be penniless. I will leave every shilling and every acre I own to a hospital; and I will never look upon my disobedient daughter's face again. If you love her, as you pretend, you will not attempt to reduce her to beggary."

"No, sir. It would be a cowardly thing to do. But if ever the day come when I am secure of five hundred a year, you may be very sure that I shall ask her to choose between love and fortune. Perhaps she will renounce her inheritance just as willingly as Lady Mary Pierrepoint renounced hers."

"If she is as crackbrained a person she may perhaps oblige you," answered the Squire, "but until this morning I have had reason to consider her a sensible girl. And now, sir, as I am due in Change Alley before noon, I must ask you—"

"I have the honour to wish you good-morning, sir."

They saluted each other stiffly and parted. Herrick felt that he had injured his chance of winning Irene by stealth, yet his conscience was relieved from a burden. He could face the world better. And who can separate youth from hope? He trusted to the unforeseen. Something would happen, some kindly chance would favour him and Irene. Mr. Bosworth would lose his head, perhaps, and ruin himself on the Stock Exchange. What could be greater bliss than to see his beloved reduced to poverty by no fault of his?

CHAPTER III.

"THEY WERE BORN POOR, LIVED POOR, AND POOR THEY DIED."

Squire Bosworth sent his daughter back to Fairmile under close guardianship, and gave up the Arlington Street lodgings, much to the disgust of Lady Tredgold and her daughters, who enjoyed their free quarters at the West End, and the fever of London drawing-rooms.

Even the gaieties of Bath, balls public and private, in Harrison's great room, breakfasts of fifty and sixty people, and card-tables nightly, morning parade upon the Gravel Walk or in the Abbey Gardens, the afternoon lounge in the galleries of the tennis-court, the ever-changing company at the White Hart lodgings, the high play, and all the other diversions of that delightful city, which had been characterised by a puritanical contemporary as "a valley of pleasure

and a sink of iniquity"—even these dissipations of the rich and idle were as nothing to that concentrated blaze of pleasure and polite profligacy which illumined the little world of Leicester Fields, Soho, Golden Square, and St. James's.

Before he left town Mr. Bosworth called on Lord Lavendale in Bloomsbury Square, and charged him with having screened his friend's underhand pursuit of Irene.

"When I admitted Mr. Durnford to my house I believed that, as your lordship's friend, he must needs be a man of honour," said the Squire. "He rewards my confidence by making surreptitious love to my daughter and heiress!"

Lavendale warmly defended his friend; praised his talents; assured Mr. Bosworth that Durnford was likely to do well in the world; to win fame and fortune before he reached life's meridian.

"I shall not be here to see him at the top of the ladder, my lord," answered the Squire grimly. "I want to marry my daughter to a man who has no such troublesome ascent to make; I want something better than castles in the air in return for solid

guineas and broad acres. My daughter's husband must bring his share of good things. If he has not wealth he must at least have rank and high birth."

"Durnford is of a good old west-country family."

"A beggarly parson's penniless son. My dear lord, the matter will not bear discussion. Warn your friend that I am adamant, and that 'twere but to waste time and thought to try to move me. There may be other good matches more attainable than my daughter. Let him look about him, and find another outlet for his enterprise in heiress-hunting."

"You insult me, Mr. Bosworth, when you insult my friend. He is a man of honour, and his passion for your daughter is entirely independent of her fortune. He deplores the ill-gotten wealth that parts him from her."

This was a home-thrust for the Squire, who clapped his hand upon his sword-hilt as if he would have challenged his host there and then, but thought better of it instantly, and bade Lord Lavendale a stiff good-morning.

Herrick rode down to Lavendale Manor next day, reached his friend's house by nightfall, passed a sleepless night, and went prowling round the fence that divided Fairmile Park from the Manor grounds all next day. He loitered and rambled from sunrise till sundown, hanging about in likely spots where he and Irene had met last summer; but there was no sign of his mistress. She was under close watch and ward, poor soul, Lady Tredgold and her daughters being her gaolers for the nonce. They were to stay till the Squire relieved guard; and then the old family coach, which had been built for Lady Tredgold when she married, was to carry them on towards Bath. Weary and heart-sick after that disappointing day, Herrick stole to the lodge at dusk, and dropped in upon the old gardener's wife. He had been crafty enough to make friends with her last summer, and had dropped more than one of his hard-earned guineas into her horny palm; so he was welcome. She told him all the news, and promised to convey a letter to Miss Bosworth, if he would only give her leave to wait for an opportunity.

"My eldest boy works in the garden," she said,

" and Mrs. Bosworth always takes notice of him. He'll find a time for giving her your letter."

Herrick wrote his letter that night, a long and exhaustive letter, entreating his beloved to stand firm, to believe in the potency of true love, and to refuse to yield her heart or her hand to any man till he should come forward to win it.

" So soon as I am sure of a modest competence, Rena, I will find the way to make you my wife, and we will laugh at your father's fortune. I will not ask you to wed beggary; but it shall go hard if within two years I am not secure of an income that will suffice for wedded lovers. Two years will not seem an eternity, even though we are forced to dwell apart. Your image will be the companion of all my hours; 'twill stand at my elbow and guide my hand as I write; 'twill flit beside me as I trudge about the town; 'twill comfort, and inspire, and guide, and protect me. It will be to me as an armour against all evil."

He waited about at Lavendale, haunting the park-rails by day, and visiting the gardener's lodge at sundown for full five days. It took the gardener's boy

all that time to find an opportunity for delivering his letter. Then there were two more days before Irene could see the boy alone and return her answer. But at last that blessed reply came, full of assurances of fidelity.

"I shall never be an undutiful daughter, or cease to think with love and gratitude of my father," she wrote in conclusion; "but my hand and my heart are my own, and those I will give to none but you."

Comforted and sustained by this letter, Herrick went back to London, and established himself there in a modest lodging of his own in a court leading out of Russell Street, Covent Garden, hard by those classic coffee-houses where all the wits and politicians of the day were wont to meet in rooms which but lately had echoed the laughter of Steele and the quieter sallies of Addison. The greatest of Queen Anne's wits had passed away; but the world of letters was still illumined by Pope, and Bolingbroke, and Swift, and Warburton, and Berkeley, and a whole galaxy of wit, erudition, and natural genius. Chief among them all perhaps was that lively Frenchman, whose vivid pen touched perfection in every line of

literature, who was by turns poet, philosopher, historian, political economist, trifler, critic, and theologian, and with whom an airy grace, a supreme audacity, and an incomparable clearness of style, served instead of the deeper thought and wider erudition of Clarke or Berkeley.

In such society no intellectual man could be unhappy, and Herrick Durnford was frankly accepted in this charmed circle. He was on good terms alike with the Ministry and with the Opposition. He dined and slept at Dawley at the beginning of the week, and drank Sir Robert's port on a Saturday evening. He loved Bolingbroke as a noble specimen of highly gifted humanity, despite his many faults; but he honoured Walpole as a master of statecraft, the minister who had the interests of the people and the country most at heart, and who knew how to maintain the prestige of England without plunging her into war. Walpole had been struck by Herrick's letters in the *Flying Post*, had asked him to dinner, and had even introduced him to Mrs. Skerritt. This last honour meant real friendship. Molly Skerritt had read the letters to

her dearest friend Lady Mary, and the two had agreed that they were clever enough to have been written by Swift. Mrs. Skerritt suggested that dear Sir Robert should give Mr. Durnford the very next vacant borough. A man who could write so well ought to be a good speaker, and good speakers were wanted now that all the best orators had gone over to the Opposition.

"The finest of them all is that poor fellow you keep muzzled yonder in his fancy farm at Uxbridge," said Mrs. Molly, somewhat pertly.

She was beautiful, and her admirer was stout, clumsy, and commonplace-looking; so she could afford to take liberties.

"Would to God I could muzzle his pen as easily as I can keep him out of the House of Lords!" answered Walpole. "The fellow is an arrant traitor, and this *Craftsman* of his will wreck the country, unless I can be a match for him and that renegade Pulteney."

When Molly Skerritt put in her word in an aspirant's favour his chances of promotion were no longer chimerical. The borough was soon found,

and within six weeks of Mrs. Skerritt's recommendation Herrick Durnford was elected for Bossiney in Cornwall, a charming little nomination borough, then in the disposal of Sir John St. Aubyn, a staunch Whig and Walpolian. The late member had been a ponderous Cornish squire who always voted as he was told, and rarely spoke. His vote was useful, his speech might have been damaging. This worthy member having expired unpretentiously of an apoplexy, Walpole sent his young friend Durnford down to Bossiney with a letter of introduction to Sir John St. Aubyn. That gentleman took his young friend round to the half a dozen tenant farmers who constituted the free and independent electors of Bossiney; Herrick drank their cider, which was nearly as bad as that he had tasted in Brittany, kissed their wives, who were buxom and fresh-complexioned, praised their horses, patted their dogs, and was returned unanimously at the polling-place, which was on a hillock beside the high-road, the central point of an imaginary village. Tradition averred that Bossiney had once been an important town, but its streets and market-place, church and chapel, had

disappeared as completely as the submerged city of Lyonesse.

Herrick entered the House determined that the member for Bossiney should no longer rank among dumb-dogs. Despite his success at the University as an after-supper speaker, he was not a great orator, not a man to thrill the House, but he was a clever debater, and he knew when and how to raise a laugh against his antagonist. He was skilled in all the passes of senatorial fence; for as some men are by instinct orators, so are some by instinct debaters. He had a knack of asking damaging questions, and seemed almost as keen on financial subjects as his illustrious chief.

His contributions to the *Flying Post* were as frequent as before he became a senator, and were more telling, for he had now the knowledge which he had lacked before. It was high treason in those days to report the proceedings of the House; but a man who knew what was happening there could give the public some benefit from his knowledge without infringing that mysterious law which protected the senate. He answered those brilliant diatribes

against the government which Bolingbroke and Pulteney were daily contributing to the *Craftsman ;* and his answers, though they may have lacked the matured style and lofty grace of him who wrote the *Patriot King,* were neither insignificant nor impotent. Men read them and talked about them, and the writer who signed himself "An Honest Englishman" was fast becoming a recognised power in the world of politics.

Neither senate nor literature kept Herrick from thinking of his betrothed. He rode down to Lavendale at least once in a fortnight, saw the friendly lodge-keeper, fee'd her useful son, and exchanged letters with Irene. On one occasion he was so happy as to see her by the old moss-grown park-rail. The watch and ward over her, kept scrupulously by kind old Mademoiselle Latour, had been relaxed so far as to allow of her riding her pony about the park ; and so the lovers met, clasped hands, touched lips, and vowed to be true to each other till death. And again, as he looked at the lovely face, Herrick was struck by Irene's likeness to that hidden portrait in Mr. Topsparkle's cabinet.

"If it is an accidental likeness, 'tis the most wonderful accident that ever came within my knowledge," he said to himself, as he sauntered back to the Manor; "but there are times when I doubt if it can be an accident. It is not a likeness in feature only, but there are characteristic points in each face hich match exactly—family marks, as it were, which indicate a particular race."

Upon his next visit he chanced for the first time to find company at the gardener's lodge, in the person of Mrs. Bridget, the nurse, who had been to Kingston in the coach for a day's holiday, and whom the return coach had just deposited at the lodge.

The nurse was loquacious, and inclined to be confidential towards one whom she knew as the beloved of her adored young mistress. From her, for the first time, Herrick heard the exact story of the finding of the dead man and the living child on the common, and how the foundling and the heiress had played together like twin cherries on one stalk till death parted them.

Herrick was deeply interested in those points of the story which were new to him. He had heard of

that infantine companionship from Rena, but she, who but vaguely remembered it, could only describe vaguely, and the story so told had been dim and shadowy. He questioned Mrs. Bridget closely, and encouraged her to dwell with a morbid diffuseness on the particulars of the orphan's illness and death. She described how both children had been brought to death's door.

"'Twas lucky the heiress recovered, and not the nameless waif," said Herrick, looking at her closely.

She returned his gaze with equal steadfastness; but he noticed that her lips whitened.

"'Twould have been a hard thing for Squire Bosworth to lose his only daughter," he went on, "while the orphan's death could matter very little to any one."

"It mattered to the poor little dear that was left behind," answered Mrs. Bridget. "She fretted sorely for her playfellow."

Herrick went back to town that night with a fixed belief and a fixed determination. He felt that he had now one more business added to the multitude of his pursuits; and that business was to find out the parentage of the nameless orphan and the

history of her unlucky father. It would be no easy task, since he had to start from zero. He had no clue to the man's identity save the place and date of his death, and Mrs. Bridget's description, derived at secondhand through Farmer Bowman, of the dead man's appearance.

It was to Tom Philter, that living register of other people's business, that he applied himself in the first instance on the very next occasion of their meeting at the Roebuck. They dined at adjacent tables, and Herrick invited Mr. Philter to join him in a pint of claret when his steak was despatched.

Philter had lived by his pen from the age of eighteen to a well-preserved nine-and-forty; and if the waif's father were, as it was supposed, a political scribbler, it was likely Philter would know something about him.

"If I know of one such starving wretch as you describe, I know of fifty," said Philter, when he had heard all that Durnford could tell him. "They were hatched on the hotbed of the Revolution, and swarmed like emmets on a nest in the Queen's time, which has been called the golden age for men of

letters, because a lucky few had rich patrons, and made fortunes by venal pens. For one man that could live by literature there have always been ninety-nine that have narrowly escaped actual starvation. And it seems that this one man of yours did verily die of want on the Queen's highway. A hard case undoubtedly. A young, well-looking man, tramping about the country with a year-old baby; a strange spectacle. No, I can recall no man of my acquaintance that would have burdened himself so over-conscientiously with his domestic obligations while there was an unguarded doorstep on which he could deposit them. Truth to tell, Mr. Durnford, I have been tolerably successful as wit and journalist for the last twenty years, and I have given the hungry brotherhood a wide berth. They are bloodsuckers, my dear sir, bloodsuckers of the most tenacious order. Your vampire cannot hold a candle to them for voracity. 'Twas only yesterday afternoon I refused a crown to that hotheaded sot Savage, whose fine-lady mother ought to keep her brat out of the gutter. 'Go to mamma, my dear fellow,' says I: 'a man of your rank, with a mother who *is* a fortune and *has been*

a countess should not be hard up for five shillings.' I think I hit him pretty hard there, Durnford."

"I think you had more than five shillings' worth without paying your score," answered Herrick. "I am very sorry for Dick Savage, who has talents, and is about the hardest-used wretch I ever met with. The worst stepmother in a fairy tale was never crueller than Colonel Brett's wife, and yet I daresay she will fatten and prosper, and live to a ripe old age."

"She was a bold hussy," said Philter: "a woman who would brazen her shame before the House of Lords, in order to divorce herself from a husband she hated, can at least claim credit for strength of character."

"Which she shows now in denying herself to her son, the innocent witness of her dishonour, and the avowed ground for her divorce."

"I doubt by the time she had survived her passion for Lord Rivers she had exhausted her regard for his offspring," said Philter carelessly.

"Nay, she betrayed her indifference from the hour of his birth, handed him over at once to his grandmother, Lady Mason, who immediately trans-

ferred him to a foster-nurse, with whom he languished in obscurity through his joyless boyhood, until his mother had him apprenticed to a cobbler in Holborn, having previously, by a most malignant lie, deprived him of a provision which Lord Rivers on his death-bed desired to bequeath him. Poor Dick has told me the story at least a dozen times."

Durnford parted with the journalist in disappointment and disgust. He knew not to whom else he could apply for help in his investigation of an unknown past. He knew not where else to turn for information, was altogether at a loss how to proceed, when a chance glimpse of Jemmy Ludderly's ferret-face in the eighteenpenny gallery at a revival of Steele's *Conscious Lovers* reminded him that here was one who belonged to a lower grade of letters, or, at all events, to a less prosperous group of scribblers and artists, than that pseudo-fashionable circle which Mr. Philter adorned. Ludderly claimed no acquaintance with modish beauties or elderly demi-reps, waved no clouded cane, affected no mincing walk, flourished no amber snuff-box, neither scented himself with pulvilio nor expended a month's pay

on a periwig. Mr. Ludderly wore the same suit of clothes from January to December, and on to a second January and a second December, would they but endure as long. Whatever money he earned he spent upon the inner rather than the outer man, drank deep in cosy tavern parlours when he was in funds, and toasted his herring or his rasher in the solitude of his garret when he was hard up, and managed to maintain a contented spirit at all times. Nothing short of absolute hunger could have spoilt his temper.

Durnford called in May's Buildings next day, and unearthed the caricaturist and lampooner in his kennel. It was Mr. Ludderly's usual breakfast-hour, and he was meekly cooking his morning rasher in an easy attire of shirt and breeches, with ungartered stockings, and the most dilapidated slippers Herrick had ever seen off a dust-heap. But the man of letters was in no wise embarrassed by his unsophisticated surroundings. He received his visitor with a friendly air, and insisted on vacating the one serviceable chair for his accommodation, while he balanced himself adroitly upon a seat from

whose wooden framework the worn-out rushes hung in a picturesque fringe.

"Don't mention it," said Jimmy, when Herrick apologised for disturbing him. "There is the bed yonder," pointing to the disordered pallet with its ragged patchwork coverlet, "a most comfortable seat at all times. Pardon me if I am for the moment preoccupied by the preparation of my modest meal," laying down his toasting-fork, and filling a little black teapot from the steaming kettle. "I am no sybarite or epicure, but I can offer you a cup of the choicest tea in London. 'Tis bohea, at a guinea a pound, from the Barber's Pole in Southampton Street. 'Twas given me t'other day by a dear creature whose latest adventure offered particular attractions to the comic Muse, but for whose sweet sake I restrained my wit."

"Boileau could not have been more gallant. And was Thalia gagged for a pound of bohea?"

"O sir, I do not say there was no solider consideration. The tea was the tilly in. I beg you to taste a dish of it."

He brought a second cup and saucer from a cor-

ner cupboard, which was at once larder, cellar, and pantry, and poured out some tea for his guest.

"I thought you were addicted to somewhat stronger liquor, Mr. Ludderly," said Durnford. "Burgundy, Champagne, or Hollands, for instance."

"My dear sir, overnight I will steep myself in an ocean of Burgundy, and will sing you that fine old French drinking-song;" and he trolled in a worn-out baritone,

"'Beau nez, dont les rubis ont cousté mainte pipe
De vin blanc et clairet,
Et duquel la couleur richement participe
Du rouge et violet.'

"But I am no morning dram-drinker. 'Tis from the teapot I take my noontide inspiration. Yet I know not if bohea be not as fatal to the nerves as Hollands. I have heard that Lord Bristol attributes his son Hervey's ill-health to the use of that detestable and poisonous plant tea. Those were his very words, as told me by no less a person than Lord Hervey's valet, who frequents my favourite tavern. Well, if 'tis poison, 'tis a pleasant poison, and keeps the brain alive while it kills the body. I learnt the

habit of bohea-bibbing from a sprig of good family who chummed with me twenty years ago in this very garret. He was a delicate effeminate creature, brought up gingerly by a widowed mother, and then flung upon the world to waste a small patrimony and starve when it was gone."

Durnford put down his cup hastily, and stared the speaker in the face.

"A friend of twenty years back!" he said. "What became of him?"

Ludderly shrugged his shoulders, and shook his head.

"I know not, unless he went as sailor or soldier, and flung away a life which he could not maintain as a civilian. He had sunk pretty low when he became my fellow-lodger, and was trying to live by his pen. He had inherited a strong attachment to the King over the water, and wrote on the losing side, a fatal mistake, till he turned his coat at my advice, and scribbled for the Whigs. I am at heart a friend to the Stuarts, but I have got my bread by abusing them. Half my living at one time was made out of Father Peter and the warming-pan."

"How long is it since you saw this gentleman?"

"He disappeared from my ken in the autumn of the year nine, the year of Malplaquet. He left London on a pilgrimage to a wealthy relative in Hampshire, whom he fancied his destitution might move to pity; but I thought that if the gentleman were a man of the world, he was more likely to set his dogs at my poor friend than to take him in and feed him. He was very low by that time, and he had an impediment to a relation's hospitality which I should deem fatal."

"What kind of impediment?"

"A motherless baby of a year and a half old—you need not blush, sir, 'twas born in wedlock—the offspring of a foolish runaway match made abroad, where my friend was bear-leader to a young nobleman."

"By heaven, it is the very man!" cried Herrick. "I thought as much from the beginning. Was not your friend's wife called Belinda?"

"That was her name. Many a night have I heard him utter it, half-strangled in a sob, as he lay

dreaming. The poor girl died in childbirth at Montpellier, where they were living for cheapness. What do you know of him ?"

"Nothing—except that if he was the man I think, he died on the Portsmouth road, died of want and exhaustion, and was found lying stark and cold, with his baby daughter beside him."

"Do you know the date of his death ?"

"Yes, 'twas the twenty-eighth of September."

"And it was on the fifteenth he took his child from her nurse at Chelsea, over against Mrs. Gwynne's Hospital, and started on his wild-goose chase after a kinsman's benevolence. He thought his relative would melt at sight of the child, which shows how little he knew of the world, poor wretch! Doubtless he arrived at his destination, had the door shut upon him, civilly or uncivilly—'twould be the same as to result—and turned his face Londonwards again, to tramp back to his den here, where he knew there was at least shelter for him. He was weak and ill when he left London, and he was all but penniless, and intended to make the journey on foot. I am not surprised that he

died on the road. I am not surprised; but even after eighteen years, I am sorry."

Honest Jemmy wiped a tear or two from his unwashed cheek with the back of a grimy hand.

"Where did they find him, sir?" he asked, after a brief silence.

"On Flamestead Common, thirty miles from London."

"He had come all the way from his kinsman's seat on the other side of Winchester. The man was a distant cousin of his father's. 'Twas not a close tie; but common humanity might have afforded him at least a temporary shelter."

"My dear Mr. Ludderly, common humanity is the most uncommon virtue I know of; 'tis rarer than common sense. Pray let me hear more of your friend. Did he ever tell you of his wife's family and origin?"

"Very little. He was strangely silent about her, and as I knew he lamented her death with an intensity of grief that was singular in a young widower, I shrank from irritating an open wound by any impertinent questions. All I ever heard of the

lady is that she was an Italian, and that if she had had her rights she would have enjoyed a handsome fortune. It is my private opinion that he stole her from her father's house, and so blighted her chance of wealth and favour."

"You do not know where they met, or where they were married?"

"No; I cannot tell you the where, but I have heard the how. They were united by an English parson whom Chumleigh met on his travels; a scamp, I take it, of your Parson Keith stamp. They were married in the house of a British consul. 'Twas a legal ceremonial; the knot could scarce have been more securely tied. Unhappily Death snapped it before the rich father could relent."

"Were pardon likely upon his part, surely the widower would have sued for it for the sake of his motherless infant?"

"Whether he sued and was refused, or never sued at all, I know not," answered Ludderly; "the man could hardly have been more secret than he was about his wife's history."

"Was he a friend of long standing?"

"No; he and I were only poverty's strange bedfellows. I picked him up one night sleeping under an archway in Holborn, penniless, dispirited, and took him home to my garret. I saw that he was a gentleman and a man of parts. I was just rich enough to give him a shelter from the wind and rain, and a supper of bread and cheese, and I had just influence enough to get him a little journeyman's work in the way of translation, as I found he was a linguist. 'Twas the year I brought out my *Adventures of Fidelia, a Young Lady of Fortune,* modelled upon Mrs. Manly's *New Atalantis.* 'Twas one of my prosperous years, and I would have kept that poor devil all the winter, could he but have pocketed his independence, and been content to share my loaf. But when I could get him no more work he grew restless and impatient, and nothing would serve him but he must go off to try his luck with his Hampshire relation. I doubt what pierced him sharpest was that he could not pay the nurse at Chelsea, and she was growing clamorous, and bade him provide otherwise for his orphan. That decided him, and he trudged off one fair September morning

with the little girl nestling on his shoulder. I bore him company as far as Putney village, and there parted with him, little thinking 'twas for ever."

"He may have been more communicative to the child's nurse than to this friendly babbler," thought Durnford; and then he asked the nurse's name, which Ludderly happened to remember, because it reminded him of his favourite paper the *Tatler*, at that time being issued thrice weekly, and its wit and humour in all men's mouths.

"The creature's name was Wagstaff," he said, "which puts me in mind of Isaac Bickerstaff and his lucubrations. I had thoughts of starting a journal upon the same model, and flatter myself that with a smart fellow like Philter to help me, as Addison helped poor Dick, I could have run the *Tatler* hard. But I could not budge for want of capital. Your printer is such an inquisitive devil, always eager to see the colour of his employer's money."

"Her name was Wagstaff," repeated Durnford, not even affecting an interest in Mr. Ludderly's

blighted ambitions, "and she lived at Chelsea, facing the Hospital for old soldiers?"

"Lived, and lives there to this day, for aught I know to the contrary," answered Ludderly.

"My dear sir, I am deeply beholden to you for so much information given with such friendly frankness. We must see more of each other. Will you dine with me at the Roebuck at four this afternoon, or will you honour me with your company at Drury Lane to see *The Conscious Lovers*, and sup at White's after the play?"

Herrick knew that to a man of Ludderly's stamp a dinner or a supper is ever a welcome attention.

"The play and the supper, by all means. I revel in the select company at White's, and though I am no gamester, there is an atmosphere in a place where they play high that flutters my breast with an emotion akin to rapture. I feel all the fever of the players without their risks."

"Mr. Ludderly, you are at once a wit and a philosopher. I shall look for you in the box-office at six o'clock. Till then, adieu."

Durnford hurried off, delighted to be free until

evening. He had to go down to the House at three o'clock. There was no measure of importance in hand, but as a tyro he was eager to watch the progress of the session. He could not afford to neglect politics even for a day, but he was bent on discovering Belinda's nurse as early as possible.

It was not quite one by the clock in the newly-finished church of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, which stood out spick and span in all the brightness of stone and marble not yet discoloured by London smoke or London weather. He set out to walk across St. James's Park and the Five Fields to Chelsea, and was in front of the Hospital within an hour. Chelsea had a pleasant rustic air, a country road thinly fringed with houses. The village was a holiday resort for the idle, famous for its Bun House, and for Barber Salter's museum of curiosities. Facing the broad open space in front of the Hospital, and at some considerable distance from that new and handsome edifice—begun by Charles II., but only finished under William and Mary—there was a row of old-fashioned cottages, including two or three of the humblest kind of shops. The corner house

nearest the country was adorned with a sign setting forth that Mary Wagstaff, widow, was licensed to sell tea and tobacco; and the unpretending lattices exhibited a small assortment of elecampane, peppermint, clay pipes, pigtail tobacco, peg-tops, battledores, worsteds, and red-herrings.

"If Mary Wagstaff be not gathered to her fathers, and yonder sign the inheritance of a stranger, I am in luck," thought Durnford.

A gray-haired matron of obese figure waddled out of a little parlour at the back of the shop on the summons of a cracked bell which dangled from the half-door. Herrick did not waste time upon preliminaries, but at once stated his business.

Was the obese lady Mrs. Wagstaff? Yes. Did she remember a certain Mr. Chumleigh who left an infant girl at nurse with her nineteen years ago?

This question was like the opening of a sluice. Mrs. Wagstaff let loose a torrent of angry speech, which sounded as if she had been brooding upon her wrongs for all those nineteen years, and had never till this moment relieved herself by uttering them. Yet doubtless she had treated her gossips to

many a lengthy disquisition upon the same theme over a supper of tripe or cowheel.

"Well do I remember him, and with good cause," she began. "An arrant swindler as ever lived, yet with all the grand airs of a fine gentleman. And the care I took of that baby! and the money I laid out upon bread and milk to feed it!"

"But did Mr. Chumleigh never pay you anything?"

"O, he brought me dribs and drabs of money sometimes—a crown-piece or a half-guinea once in a way. There was never such a pauper; he looked half-starved; and would come with his long face and paltry excuses, when I had kept his brat till my patience was worn out—she was a sweet child, I will not deny, and I was very fond of her."

Mrs. Wagstaff rambled on with an air of being inexhaustible in speech, and Herrick listened with admirable patience. He wanted to hear all that she could tell him about the child's father, and was therefore content to listen to a great deal of extraneous matter respecting the nurse and her charge's infantine maladies.

"Ah, and bad work I had with her, for she was

cutting her teeth all the time, and used to keep me awake night after night, walking up and down with her and singing to her. But she throve with me wonderful, and she was a fine healthy baby as ever was, though I doubt she'd been ill-used before she came to me."

"Ill-used, do you think?"

"Yes, sir, that was my very word, and I'm not going to take it back again," answered Mrs. Wagstaff defiantly. "I don't mean that her father ill-treated her, or her mother; but the poor little thing had been put out to one of those French nurses," with ineffable disgust, "a nice pack of trumpery, no better than your Leaguer ladies for morals. Mr. Chumleigh told me how he found out that the hussy who suckled his child was no better than she should be, and drank like a fish. And one night that she was nursing the baby, and making believe to rock it to sleep, when she was half asleep herself with Burgundy wine, she tilted her chair forward a little too far and tumbled over into the fire, baby and all, she did. The nurse was burnt worse than the child, and it's a wonder she lived to

tell the tale: but the baby struck her poor little shoulder against a red-hot iron bar, and if she's alive she carries the scar to this day. 'Twas a deep brand just where the arm joins the shoulder, and I take it 'twill never wear out."

"How long was the little one with you?"

"Between nine and ten months. I kept her as long as I could, but my poor husband was living at that time, and he was a man of his word. Mr. Chumleigh was to pay me three-and-sixpence a week for the child, and he owed me over three pounds, when my good man lost patience, and threatened to throw the child into the street if I didn't get rid of it civilly. I was to deliver it back to its father, or take it to the constable. So I had no help but to tell Mr. Chumleigh he must fetch the child away, and I told him so point-blank the next time he came to see the little one. He was shabbier than ever, poor soul, and he looked pinched and hungry. I'd rather have offered him a dinner than flung his child upon his hands, but my good man was sitting in the parlour there, listening to every word I said; so I just told Mr.

Chumleigh I could hold out no longer, he must just take the child and go about his business. He looked very sorrowful, and then he seemed to recover himself in a minute, and threw up his head with a proud air, as if he had been a nobleman. 'Very well, Mrs. Wagstaff,' he said: 'I grant you have been ill-treated, but it might have been better if you'd had more patience with me. Fortune must turn at last for the most miserable of us. I've a rich relation in the country. I must plod down to him and ask for a home for my motherless one. Sure he can't resist these sweet eyes.' I was almost crying when he shook hands and bade me good-bye, though I tried to be hard with him. 'If ever I can pay you my debt, madam, be sure I will,' says he; and so he went out at that door, with the child cooing in his arms, and I never saw more of him from that day to this."

"And never will, madam, on this side of Eternity," said Herrick gravely; "the poor creature sank upon that cruel journey on which your husband sent him."

"O sir, don't blame my husband! Remember,

the poor gentleman owed us over three guineas. 'Tis a good deal for people in our station."

"Yet I'll warrant you had a few guineas in a stocking somewhere. 'Twould not have broken you if you had kept the child a little longer."

"No, sir, I don't say that it would have broken us—"

"Then it must go hard with you to remember how cruelly you dealt with an unfortunate gentleman. But I am not here to reproach you, madam. I came for information, and I thank you for having given it me so freely."

He tried to learn more of Chumleigh's character and circumstances, but here Mrs. Wagstaff's information was of the most limited order. The broken-down gentleman had been singularly silent about his past life. Mrs. Wagstaff only knew that he was a gentleman, and this knowledge she had by intuition, not being versed in the ways of gentlefolks, but finding in this one something that was not in the commonality.

Herrick went back to London feeling very well satisfied with his morning's work, though it would

not seem that he had learnt much from nurse Wagstaff.

"There is at any rate the means of settling one doubt," he told himself, as he walked back by the Five Fields, a place of unhappy notoriety as a favourite duelling-ground; and duelling was still a prevailing fashion, though Steele and Addison had done their best to write it down in the *Tatler*, and though the mutual murder of the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Mohun in Hyde Park had not long ago given a shock to polite society.

CHAPTER IV.

"YOU STOP MY TONGUE, AND TEACH MY HEART TO SPEAK."

THE tamest lover would hardly endure prolonged severance from his mistress without making some efforts to see her, were it but for the briefest space; and although Herrick did not intend to steal the heiress from her father's custody, he was, on the other hand, determined not to languish in perpetual absence. By fair means or foul he must contrive a meeting; and he had by this time placed himself on such a friendly footing with the gardener's wife, Mrs. Chitterley, that he was sure of allegiance and help from all her family. So, one fair May morning, there came a pedlar, with his pack of books on his shoulders and a stout oak sapling in his hand, thick shoes whitened by dust, a shabby suit of

linsey woolsey, and brown worsted stockings—a pedlar of swarthy complexion, and eyes obscured by green spectacles in heavy copper rims. The pedlar turned into the lodge at Fairmile before approaching the house, and conversed for some minutes with Mrs. Chitterley, who was very much at her ease with him; for scarcely had he spoken three words before she discovered that this dusty hawker was the London gentleman, Lord Lavendale's friend, who had been so liberal in his bounties to her and her children.

"You knew my voice, Mrs. Chitterley; but do you think the good people up at the house yonder will recognise me?"

"Not unless they hear you talk, sir; I took you for a stranger when you came in at the door just now. I never dreamt 'twas you."

"And now if I were to change my voice, and speak so?"

He had excelled as a mimic in days gone by, and now he adopted the manner of an old college chum, whose peculiar utterance he had been wont to imitate.

"Lord, sir, nobody will ever know you if you talk like that!"

"Then I'll venture it. But I hope to find Mrs. Bosworth in the garden with her *gouvernante*, and then I need not go to the house at all."

"She almost lives in the garden, sir, this fine weather."

"Then I'll try my luck," said Herrick, shouldering his pack, which he had brought from no further than Lavendale Manor, where he had put on his pedlar's clothes and stained his complexion. He tramped along the avenue, struck off to the right hand before he reached the house, and made his way by a by-path to a little gate in a holly hedge, by which he entered the garden. All Squire Bosworth's old family plate was laid up in safe keeping at his goldsmith's, and the approaches to Fairmile Court were not over-jealously guarded. Herrick knew his way about the gardens. He had walked there last summer in the sweet sunset leisure of after dinner, when he and Lavendale were the Squire's honoured guests, Mr. Bosworth never suspecting that his lordship's companion could be his rival. He knew all

Irene's favourite nooks and corners, and where to look for her.

He found her sitting under a cedar which Evelyn of Wootton had planted with his own hands, an enduring evidence of that accomplished gentleman's friendship for Squire Bosworth's grandfather. She was not alone, but, instead of her usual companion and governess, she had Mrs. Bridget, the nurse, who was sitting on a little wooden stool, knitting a stocking, while Irene sat on the grass close by, with an open book in her lap.

Now it happened that, next to Irene herself, Bridget, the nurse, was the person whom Herrick most ardently desired to see.

"Can I sell you a book, ladies?" he began in his feigned voice, standing a little way off, and opening his pack. "Here is *Gulliver's Travels*, the most wonderful book that was ever written, the book all the great folks in London were mad about last winter; and here is *Robinson Crusoe*, and *The History of the Plague*, and—"

But Irene had started to her feet. Disguise his complexion, hide his eyes, alter his voice as he

might, she knew him. She would have known him anywhere, and under even stranger conditions. The electricity of true love flashed from his soul to hers.

"Herrick!" she cried, "it is you!"

Mrs. Bridget also rose with a troubled air; but Irene laid a restraining hand upon her nurse's arm.

"You won't tell anybody, you'll let us talk to each other a little while?" she pleaded; and then in her most caressing manner, "you can hear all we say. I have no secrets from you, dear old Bridget."

"I'll warrant Mrs. Bridget would hardly swear so much on her side," said Herrick, with a lurking significance in his tone. "When people come to your nurse's age, Irene, they are apt to have a secret or two, be they ever so honest."

"Nay, I'll vouch for it, my Bridget has no secrets from me," protested the girl, hanging on her nurse's ample shoulder.

The nurse turned and kissed her darling, but answered not a word.

"And so you knew me at once, Irene; what an eagle eye you have!"

"If you had come as a blackamoor, I should have

known you just as easily," she answered gaily; "and to change your voice too, and speak in those queer gruff tones, and think to cheat me! What a foolish person you must be!"

They seated themselves side by side on a rustic bench, while Bridget resumed her stool and her knitting at a discreet distance.

"What has become of your governess?" asked Herrick.

"She had letters to write to her relations in France—a married sister, and half a dozen nephews and nieces, who live in the south and whom she dearly loves, though she has not seen them for ages. So I made her stay indoors to write her letters, and brought Bridget for my companion. My father has given strict orders that I am to be looked after, lest you should find your way to me. But of all people, Bridget is the one I can trust most confidently. She would cut off her head if she could make me happy by losing it. And now, tell me everything about yourself, more even than your dearest letters can tell. Remember how long it is since we last met."

"Do I ever forget, love? ever cease to count

the days and hours that we are doomed to live apart?"

And then he told her his successes, his dreams and hopes, the ever-strengthening hope of independence, Sir Robert's favour and friendship, the world's growing esteem.

"In two years, at most, Irene, I count upon being able to offer you a home; but it will be a very poor home compared with this, and you will sacrifice a great fortune if you become my wife."

"I have told you before that I do not value fortune."

"Yes; but shall not I be ungenerous to accept so vast a sacrifice?"

"It will be no sacrifice. I tasted all that wealth can give last winter in London, and I found no pleasure in fine clothes or fine company, dances and dinners, except when you were near. I know what the great world is like, and can renounce it without a sigh. But I should like to wander with you in that wide beautiful world of mountains, and lakes, and strange foreign cities, which so few people seem to care about. All the people I met last winter used

to talk as if there were no world beyond Leicester Fields and St. James's Park—nothing worth living for but cards and fine company."

"Foolish people, Irene, in whom all natural impulses are stifled by the close atmosphere of a Court. Yes, we will travel, dearest, when you are my wife. I will show you some of the loveliest spots on this earth; yet we will not be mere vagabonds, love; we will not spend our lives in exile. This little island of ours is worth living in, and worth working for. We will have our cottage at Chelsea, or our lodgings in London, as you shall decide; and it shall be your task to fan the flame of ambition and stimulate your husband to perseverance and earnestness. For the man who is ambitious and persevering there can be no such thing as failure."

"Let us live in London," said Irene, delighted with a discussion which seemed to bring their future union nearer. "For in London we need be seldom parted. I shall hate even the House of Commons if it takes you from me too often or too long at a time."

"Then we will have a lodging in Spring Gardens,

where I can run backwards and forwards, and spend my life between the senate and my home."

Childish talk, when union was still so far off; but it was a kind of talk which made Herrick intensely happy, for it gave him the assurance of winning his sweetheart for a wife, even though Parson Keith had to wed them. She who was so willing to fling away fortune for his sake would not let him languish for ever under her father's ban. The day must come when she would be ready to forsake that stern father for her lover's sake. It was for him to make their union easy, by the assurance of a modest competence.

When they had fully discussed their future dwelling, even to the style of the furniture and the prospect from the windows, Herrick began to question Irene about the companion of her infancy, the waif from whom death had parted her so early.

"I can remember very little," she said. "It is mostly dim, like a dream. Yet there are hours that I can recall. I have but to close my eyes, and her face comes back to me, smiling lovingly, so gentle, so sweet. She must have been fairer than I—I remember a face like alabaster, with rosebud lips, and hair

like pale gold. I have seen just such a face in pictures of angels. I remember playing with her under yonder cedar. It was one of our favourite spots. And I remember hide-and-seek in the old stables the day we both caught the fever. How happy we were that day! and it is the last I can remember of our play or our happiness. Perhaps I should remember much more if I had not had that terrible fever; for my cousins have told me how vividly they can recall their childhood. Mine seems like a picture half rubbed out, with distinct patches left here and there upon the canvas."

"Mrs. Bridget must remember your little companion," said Herrick, glancing at the nurse. "Will you call her here, Rena? I should like to ask her a few questions."

Irene beckoned, and Bridget came over to the bench.

"I have been talking of the little girl who died, Mrs. Bridget," began Herrick, with a friendly air. "It has happened to me very curiously within the last few days to come upon traces of that infant's father, and of the first year of her life. Now, I know

you were very fond of her, and that you must be interested in anything that relates to her."

Without a moment's warning nurse Bridget began to cry. Rena made her sit down between them, and dried her tears, and soothed her with sweetest caresses.

"Why should you be so broken-hearted about her, you poor old dear soul?" she said; "you were never unkind to her, I am sure."

"No, I was never unkind to her—I have not that upon my conscience," sobbed Bridget; "but I have never forgotten her pretty face and her sweet little ways, and how loving she was to me, dear soul. And to hear of her suddenly—O sir, what did you discover about the poor man who was found dead on Flamested Common?" she asked, recovering herself with an effort.

"I heard that he was a man of good birth, by name Chumleigh. I heard some particulars of his youth and his marriage, and I mean to find out more. Having got so far upon the traces of his history it will hardly be difficult to learn the rest."

"But what good will it do to any one, sir," asked

Bridget, "since the child has been dead so many years? There is nobody to profit by your knowledge."

"Who can say as much as that, Mrs. Bridget? Knowledge is power. I should like to know the history of Mrs. Bosworth's little companion. It pleases me to think that she was something better than a beggar's brat—a child of good birth, and, for all I know, entitled on the mother's side to a large fortune."

Bridget became suddenly alert and interested.

"A fortune did you say, sir?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean that my darling had a right to a ortune?"

"I have reason to believe the child's mother had at least the expectation of wealth; but it was contingent upon the caprice of a rich father: just like your mistress's fortune, which she may lose if she disobey the Squire."

"They all said he was a gentleman," remarked Bridget musingly. "I have heard Farmer Bowman talk about him many a time—he was thin and wasted with hunger, the farmer said; but he had been a

handsome young man, and his clothes were a gentleman's clothes, though they were worn almost to rags."

"Were there any papers found upon him?"

"Yes, the Squire brought home a parcel of papers; but there was nothing among them all to show who he was. I have heard my master say as much."

"Well, it will be my business to find out Mr. Chumleigh's relatives, and from them I may hear all about his marriage. I have seen the woman who had care of his motherless baby till within a fortnight of the time she was brought into this house."

"Indeed, sir! That is very strange."

"Strange indeed, Mrs. Bridget; but this world of ours is a much smaller place than we think."

"The mother was dead then, sir?"

"Yes, the mother died directly after the child's birth."

"And had the woman been good to her, do you think?"

"Fairly good, I take it; but her first nurse, the woman who took her from her dying mother's breast, was a careless unworthy wretch."

"As how, sir?"

"An accident of which I was told would prove as much."

Bridget was thoughtful, but did not inquire the nature or the history of this accident. The recollection of her lost charge seemed to be full of trouble to her.

Herrick said no more about Mr. Chumleigh or his child. He had said all he intended to say, and had keenly watched the effect of his revelations upon nurse Bridget. And now it was time for him to leave this paradise, lest some servant should pass that way and take note of his presence, or lest Mademoiselle should come in quest of her pupil. Rena had been glancing uneasily towards the house, momently expecting the apparition of her *gouvernante*.

"Wilt thou walk with me as far as the old boundary, dearest, where I have spent so many a happy half-hour?" pleaded Herrick; "Mrs. Bridget will keep guard while you go."

"It is near dinner-time, but I will venture," answered Rena, "at the risk of a scolding."

They rambled together under the interlacing boughs, down to the old trysting-place, and before

they parted Herrick urged Rena to meet him there now and then, were it only for five minutes' talk stolen from her gaolers.

"I can usually contrive to send you a line by our juvenile friend at the lodge," he said. "He is a serviceable little fellow, and has a precocious sympathy with true lovers. You can hardly be so close watched that you could not steal this way in your rambles."

"My father has given strict orders against my going out alone," said Irene, "but Ma'amselle is not a jealous guardian, and I might slip away from her on some pretext or other—though it seems cruel to cheat such a trustful duenna."

And so they parted, with the understanding that when Herrick was next at Lavendale Manor they should contrive a meeting in the old spot, endeared to them by the remembrance of their first chance encounter and many a subsequent rendezvous. It would not be often that Herrick would have such an opportunity, for he had his battle of life to fight, and business would chain him to London and his solitary lodgings at the back of Russell Street.

CHAPTER V.

"AND IN SUCH CHOICE SHALL STAND MY WEALTH AND WOE."

HERRICK went back to London that evening. Lavendale was in Bloomsbury Square, and would have had his familiar friend and companion to live with him there if Herrick would have consented; but Herrick was sternly resolved upon a life of hard work and almost Spartan plainness. He was filled with ambition, with that keen desire of success for the sake of a loved object, with that same generous unselfishness which made Steele so happy, when he had earned a handful of guineas, to cast them into the lap of his "dearest Prue." So he refused to leave his two-pair lodging in the alley near Button's; and he worked on with an honest purpose which made success a foregone conclusion. But in spite of the close occupation of his parliamentary duties and his

work as a journalist, Mr. Durnford found time to travel by heavy coach to Winchester, whence a hired horse conveyed him to the mansion of Sir John Chumleigh, a county magnate, and chief representative of an ancient Tory and High Church family, a gentleman whose grandfather had bled and died for the King in the Civil War, and whose father had held himself sullenly aloof from the Dutch usurper, and had lived and died on his own estate. The present Sir John Chumleigh was a sportsman and an agriculturist; lived only for farming and foxhunting, and despised all the other interests and ambitions of mankind. He had married the daughter of a needy nobleman, a fine lady who had been slowly fretting herself to death amidst the rude plenty of a rural establishment for the last twenty years, and was a wonder to all her neighbours inasmuch as she was still alive.

To this gentleman Mr. Durnford presented himself one sunny afternoon.

He found the Baronet in a panelled parlour, seated at a table covered with documents of a business character. Sir John was big and burly, wore leather

breeches and top-boots in winter and summer, and had all his clothes cut in a style which suggested the hunting-field rather than the drawing-room. He was a man who would start in the winter starlight, before the first ray of dawn had begun to glimmer in the eastern sky, in order to ride fifteen miles to a meet. He had a couple of packs, a magnificent stud of hunters, hunted four times a week, and considered every guinea squandered which was not spent upon kennel or stable. He was prouder of being master of hounds than he would have been of being Prime Minister. Herrick glanced at the whip-racks, the rows of spurs, the vizards and brushes, which adorned the walls, and at once understood the kind of man with whom he had to deal, and he was prepared to encounter a frank off-hand incivility rather than hypocritical courtesy.

He stated his business briefly.

"I have a very particular reason, sir, for being interested in the history of a member of your family who fell upon evil fortunes, and died young, leaving a motherless infant behind him."

"My good sir, my family tree has spread deuced

wide since the Chumleighs—an old Norman race—first took root in the land; and if you expect me to give information about every beggarly twig that has withered upon it within the last half-century—"

"This gentleman I take to have been a somewhat near relation, Sir John, since it was to you he turned in the hour of his direst necessities."

"Yes, sir, they all do that: they go to a well-to-do relative as naturally as an old dog-fox goes to ground."

"Do you remember a cousin who came to you in the year nine—'twas in the autumn, shortly after Malplaquet—with a little girl, a mere baby—"

"I'm not likely to forget the fact, sir. What, a trumpery third or fourth cousin to come to my house, with a squaller of eighteen months old, expecting to be housed and fed for an indefinite period; since, having once found comfortable quarters, that kind of vagrant would not be inclined to resume his march in a hurry! It was as much as I could do to be barely civil to that idle vagabond; but I mastered my indignation so far as to offer him a substantial meal, which he refused, and a guinea,

which he flung to the footman who showed him the way out—"

"Preferring to tramp back towards London with an empty stomach rather than to feed on your charity," said Durnford; "a false pride, no doubt, sir, but there are men who would die rather than accept a reluctant favour. Your hospitable offer was the last chance of a meal your kinsman had, for he died of starvation on the road to London, and his orphan was adopted by one Squire Bosworth, a landed gentleman at Fairmile in Surrey."

"How do you know that he died of want, sir?" asked Sir John, somewhat dashed in his spirits.

"O sir, the fact is notorious;" and then Durnford related those two chapters of Chumleigh's story which he had heard from Mr. Ludderly and the nurse at Chelsea, and from Mrs. Bridget and others at Fairmile.

"Well, sir, 'tis a pitiful tale," said the Baronet, "but there is hardly a man in England rich enough to provide for all his poor relations. The lean kine would eat up all the fat kine, sir, if mistaken benevolence were to attempt the task, and the kingdom

would be reduced to a dead level of poverty. Gad's curse, sir! everybody would be paupers. There would be no green spot in the desert. 'Tis sounder wisdom and truer benevolence in the rich to keep their estates together, to maintain a good household, feed their dependents, and uphold trade. However, I am sorry this misguided young man came to a scurvy end."

"Dare I ask why you call him misguided, sir?"

"Because he made the vast mistake of trying to live by his wits, instead of by some steady and honest industry—because he thought to make his living by hanging about London, sitting idle in coffee-houses, and picking up stray notions from the town wits—Dryden, Congreve, Wycherley, Addison, Steele, and the rest of 'em—to retail secondhand in the newspapers at a penny a line. Better to have carried a musket or swept a crossing. And then when he was bear-leader and earning handsome wages, with the run of his teeth at the best inns on the Continent, and a coach-and-six to carry him all over Europe—an education which should have made him as good a writer as that Mr. Addison whom people

thought so much of—he must needs spoil all his chances by running off with a girl out of an Italian convent, and causing a fine hubbub among the priests."

"Was the lady a cloistered nun?" asked Durnford eagerly.

"Why no; 'twas said she was but a boarder or pupil in the convent, handsomely paid for by a wealthy father, who kept so much in the dark as to his daughter that she may be said to have been nameless, and 'twas shrewdly guessed she was the offspring of some low intrigue whom the father was glad to hide within convent-walls, in the hope she would take the veil and rid him of all trouble about her."

"Since you heard so much, Sir John, you must have heard the father's name?"

"There you are out in your reckoning, sir. My only information came by a sort of explanatory letter which my foolish cousin sent me—having a kind of deference for me as the head of the family—soon after his marriage."

"Would you oblige me so far as to let me see

that letter, sir, which I make no doubt you have preserved?" asked Durnford.

"Nay, young sir, you go somewhat fast. Will you do me the favour to explain by what right you would grope in the mystery of Chumleigh's life and marriage? What interest can my dead kinsman have for you, a stranger, that I should let you pry into the scandals of his mistaken youth?"

"I will be plain with you, Sir John. My interest in Mr. Chumleigh arises indirectly. His orphan daughter, who died of a fever at the age of five, was the beloved playfellow of a young lady whom I hope to make my wife. It is for her sake I am curious about your kinsman's history."

"'Tis a roundabout sentimental kind of interest, sir, which, were you less of a gentleman, I should feel devilishly indisposed to gratify," said Sir John. "Pray may I ask, sir, who and what you are? for your name, though it has a respectable sound, gives me no information on that point."

"To begin with, then, Sir John, I belong to that fraternity of scribblers to which you object. Without being exactly a haunter of coffee-houses, I have a

profound reverence for the shades of Dryden and Addison, whose bodily presence was once familiar at Wills's and at Button's—indeed 'twas Mr. Addison who gave the vogue to the latter house, which is kept by an old servant of Lady Warwick's; and as for wits in the flesh, I have ever hung with delight upon the discourse of Congreve and Swift, Pope and Gay. Yes, Sir John, I too am that low thing, a man who lives by his brains; but I have another profession besides that of scribbler."

"May I know your secondary occupation, sir?"

"I have the honour to represent the borough of Bossiney in his Majesty's Parliament."

"Indeed, sir! You are in the House, are you? And I'll warrant you are an arrant Whig."

"I hope, Sir John, that will not prejudice you against me."

"Nay, Mr. Durnford, I have ceased to be a partisan. There was a time when I was a red-hot Jacobite, and looked to Harley and St. John to open the Queen's eyes to her duty as a daughter and a sister, and so, without violence or damage to the country, to bring in King James III. so soon as the

throne should be vacant. But when I saw how easily Harley and St. John were beaten, and how quietly the country knuckled under to a middle-aged foreigner who could not speak a word of our language; and when that miserable flash in the pan of the year fifteen showed me how feeble a crew were the Jacobites of England and Scotland—faith, sir, the best man among them was Winifred Countess of Nithisdale—I began to think that I had better stay at home, and hunt my hounds and keep clear of politics. Neither party has ever benefited me; and I say with the gentleman in the play which the Winchester Mummers acted last Easter, 'A plague on both your houses!' So Whig or Tory is all as one to me, Mr. Durnford. And now will you crack a bottle of Burgundy, or will you drink a glass or two of Malaga, after your long ride?"

Sir John had talked himself into a good temper, and Herrick thought that he might drink himself into a still more gracious humour, so frankly accepted his offer of a bottle; whereupon the butler brought a massive silver tray with decanters of Burgundy and Malaga, and a dish of crisp biscuits, made after a

particular recipe which had been in the family from the time of Queen Bess, who had lain at Chumleigh Manor in one of her innumerable peregrinations, whereby she had laid upon the family the burden of for ever preserving the antique furniture and cut velvet hangings of the room in which her royal person had reposed. Charles II. had been a more frequent visitor, putting up at Chumleigh on several occasions when his Court was quartered at Winchester for the hunting in the New Forest, and when he and his favourites had hunted with the Chumleigh foxhounds. Sir John prattled of those glorious days as he sipped his Malaga, which was a fine heady wine.

He sipped and prosed, describing those great days in which royalty had hunted with his father's foxhounds and drunk of his father's wines, and finally talked himself into such an expansive temper that he pressed Herrick to put up at Chumleigh Manor for the night, and leave Winchester by the coach which started at eight next morning. This offer Mr. Durnford thought it wise to accept, as it might afford the opportunity for getting better

acquainted with the history of the Chumleigh family, and that Philip Chumleigh in whose fate he was so keenly interested.

It was dusk by this time. The Baronet had dined at three, and he was in for an evening's good-fellowship.

"Her ladyship will take it ill if we do not go to the drawing-room for a dish of tea," he said; "but we can come back to my study afterwards, and I'll show you my kinsman's letter, and as many memorials of the house of Chumleigh as you may care to look at. Our pedigree is more interesting than that of most county families, for the Chumleighs have married into several noble houses. We are an historical race, sir."

The drawing-room was on the other side of a large hall, paved with black and white marble, and with a lantern roof, after Inigo Jones. It was a spacious and handsome apartment, hung with old Italian pictures of manifest worthlessness, interspersed with portraits of the house of Chumleigh by Holbein, Vandyke, Lely, and Kneller. The present owner and his wife had been painted by this last

artist, and their half-length portraits occupied places of honour on either side of the high chimney-piece, which was an elaborate structure in white and coloured marble, with the armorial bearings of the Chumleighs carved in high relief on the central panel.

Beside the fireplace sat a faded, little woman, who rose with a languid air when her husband presented the stranger, and sank almost to the carpet in a kind of swooning curtsy.

"Indeed, sir, it is a privilege to see any one at Chumleigh who has seen the town within twelve months," she said to Herrick, in acknowledgment of her husband's half-apologetic introduction of the stranger. "We live here in the wilds, and our most intellectual company are huntsmen and feeders. There is scarcely an hour of the day when I am free from the intrusion of a great hulking fellow redolent of kennel or stable."

"My dear, I must see my servants, and unless you and I are to live in separate houses I know not how you are to escape an occasional whiff of the stable," grumbled Sir John.

"O, I must forgive you your servants," replied

his wife, "since your friends are but a shade better—men who have but two subjects of discourse: the last horse they have bought, or the last run in which they were thrown out, or in which they were first at the death. They seem almost as proud of one circumstance as of the other. But pray, sir," turning to Herrick, and exposing a scornful and somewhat scraggy shoulder to her husband, "tell me the last news in town. Is Lady Mary Hervey as great a toast as ever? I for my part never thought her a beauty, though she has some good points. And is her husband still a valetudinarian?"

"Yes, madam, Lord Hervey is always complaining, but as he contrives to perform all his Court duties, which are onerous, I take it he is more robust than the world thinks him, or than he thinks himself."

"And Mrs. Howard? Has she finished her new house at Twit'nam?"

"Marble Hill? Yes, madam, 'tis just finished, and is the prettiest thing for its size I ever saw."

"And is she still the first favourite with his Majesty?"

"That, madam, she has never been, and never

will be. The Queen is the reigning sultana at Kensington and at Richmond, whatever illicit loves may beguile his Majesty's sojourn at Hanover, where one would think his heart was fixed, so eager is he ever to get there."

"Indeed, sir! Then it is Vashti and not Esther who reigns. I am glad of that, for the sake of honour and honesty. Why does not the King send Mrs. Howard about her business?"

"O madam, such an idea is furthest from his thoughts. He must have somewhere to spend his evenings. The Queen is his mentor, his chief counsellor, and he knows it, though he affects to think otherwise: he must have an amiable stupid woman to talk to by way of relaxation. No one could endure the perpetual company of the goddess Minerva. Be assured, madam, Venus was as empty-headed as she was pretty, and that's why she had so many adorers."

"You give a very bad notion of your own sex, sir," retorted the lady, busying herself with the tea-tray, which had been brought in during the discussion. "But as for beauty, I never thought Mrs. Howard could claim dominion upon that account.

She has fine hair and a good complexion; but how many a milkmaid can boast as much!"

"Doubtless, madam; and a milkmaid would be just as pleasing to King George, if she were a little deaf and very complacent."

"For shame, sir! Let us talk no more of this odious subject. Pray enlighten me about the theatres. Is Drury Lane or Lincoln's Inn most fashionable? I have not seen a play for a century. Sir John has always an excuse for not taking me to London."

"The best in the world, my love, an empty purse," answered the Baronet cheerily.

"No wonder your purse is empty when you squander hundreds upon your kennels," complained the lady, who was fond of airing her grievances before a third person.

"Squander, my lady? squander, did you say? To maintain a pack of foxhounds is to perform a public duty; it is to be the chief benefactor of one's neighbourhood. When I can no longer pay for my kennels and support my church may I lie in my grave under the shadow of the tower, where the

music of my hounds can no longer gladden my ear. No, madam, the maintenance of an historic pack is no selfish extravagance. It is the highest form of philanthropy. It gives sport to the wealthy and employment to the poor; it affords pleasure to gentle and simple, old and young. If you could sit a horse, Maria, you would not talk such foolish cant as to call my kennel an extravagance."

This question of horsemanship was always a sore point with Lady Chumleigh, and no less savage beast than a husband would have been brutal enough to touch upon it.

"Had I health and strength for such rough work as hunting, I make no doubt I could ride as well as my neighbours," replied the lady, with a semi-hysterical sniffling sound which alarmed her spouse, as it was often the forerunner of shrill screams, and shriller laughter, tapping of red-heeled shoes on the carpet, cutting of laces, burning of feathers, and spilling of essences, with all the troublesome rites of the Goddess Hysteria.

"And so indeed you could, my dearest love," he cried, eager to avert the storm; "you have the

neatest figure for the saddle on this side Winchester, and would be the prettiest little hussy in the hunting-field if you had but the courage to ride my bay Kitty, than which no sheep was ever tamer."

"It is not courage I want, Sir John, but stamina," murmured the dame, appeased and smiling.

"I hope you like this bohea, Mr. Durnford," she said blandly; "it is the same as the Duchess drinks at Canons."

Herrick declared it was the best tea he had tasted for an age. Sir John informed his wife that the stranger would sup with them, and stay the night; and then the two gentlemen went back to the library, where Mr. Chumleigh's letter was produced from an iron box containing family documents.

Herrick read it slowly and meditatively, trying to get the most he could out of a very brief statement.

"Montpellier, October 20, 1706.

"My dear Sir John,—As you may happen to hear of my marriage, and perhaps from those who may not be friendly to me, I think it my duty to

furnish you with some particulars of that event which so nearly concerns the happiness and honour of two people, my wife and myself.

"Imprimis, you will be told perhaps that I stole my wife from a convent. Well, so I did, but she was under no vow, had taken no veil: was only a young lady placed there by her guardian as pupil and boarder; and from what I know I believe she might have been left to languish there in a dismal confinement within the four high walls of an ancient Italian garden, if love and I had not rescued her. It is needless to make a long story of how we met by chance in the convent chapel, and afterwards by contrivance, and how we soon discovered that Providence had designed us each for the other. I never had a dishonourable feeling in regard to my charmer, and my crime in carrying her off from that sanctimonious prison-house was no more than if I had run away with a young lady from a fashionable seminary at Bath or Tunbridge. She brought me no fortune, and may never bring me a shilling, though I have reason to believe her father is inordinately rich. You will think it strange when I tell you that his

daughter does not even know his name, and has no recollection of his person, or having ever seen him since her infancy. The only person connected with her who ever visited the convent was a steward, who came twice a year to pay her pension, and who always brought her valuable presents. I can but think that my dearest girl must have been the offspring of an illicit love, and that her parent must be one of that race of travelling Englishmen who affect the Continent most because of its wider scope for dissolute habits.

"She was treated with much respect and consideration by the nuns, but they never told her anything about her own history. To her natural questions on this subject she received one unalterable reply: 'You will know all in good time.'

"That time, by my act, may never come; for my wife knows not how or where to address her mysterious parent. It may be that I have cut her off from the inheritance of a splendid fortune, and that thought gives me some uneasiness, as I see her smiling upon me while I write these lines in our humble lodging. But we are both so happy that I

can scarce doubt we have done wisely in obeying the sweet impulsion that united our lives, as I have an honest intention of working hard to win independence, and trust the day may come when we shall afford to scorn the wealth of a profligate who was ashamed to acknowledge his lovely and innocent child.

"I hope, sir, when I go to London with my wife next summer, with the intention of entering my name at the Temple, you will honour us both with your countenance, and that in the mean time you will be assured I have done nothing to forfeit your goodwill as the head of our family.—I have the honour to remain, my dear sir, your very affectionate and dutiful servant, PHILIP CHUMLEIGH."

This was all, and gave but little precise information.

"You have no other letters of your kinsman's bearing upon his marriage, sir?" inquired Herrick.

"None."

"And did he tell you nothing more when he called upon you afterwards with his child?"

"Nothing. To tell you the truth, sir," said the Baronet, who, warmed by a second bottle, now glowed with a generous candour, "I was in a mighty ill mood for receiving an out-at-elbows relation upon the particular afternoon this gentleman came here; for I had just brought home the finest hunter in my stud dead lame from a stumble into a blind ditch. I could have turned upon my own mother, sir; and then comes this third cousin of mine with a puling brat, and tells me he has not a penny in the world, and asks me to give him hospitality till his fortunes mend—whereas there was no more hope of his fortunes mending than of my poor Brown Bess getting a new leg—and I daresay I may have answered him somewhat uncivilly; and so we parted, as I told you, in a rage. But I am sorry for it, now you tell me he died of hunger. 'Tis hard for a gentleman to sink so low."

"Will you allow me to take a copy of that letter, Sir John?"

"A dozen, sir, if you please. There are pens on that standish, and paper somewhere on the table. I'll go and smoke my pipe in the saddle-room while

you act scribe, and I daresay when you've finished it will be supper-time, and we shall both be in appetite for a chine and a venison pasty. We keep country hours.'

CHAPTER VI.

"THE LADIES THERE MUST NEEDS BE ROOKS."

Mr. Durnford went back to London and worked hard in the senate and in his study, eschewing all those scenes of pleasure and dissipation which had once been his natural atmosphere. Lord Lavendale remonstrated with him for having turned hermit and forsaken his friend.

"Thou wert once as my twin brother, Herrick," he said, "but thou art now as some over-wise cousin, too sober and industrious to be on good terms with folly."

"I am in love, Jack, and I have a serious purpose in this life which gives strength to resolution and sweetens labour."

"Joseph Addison himself, the Christian philosopher, never pronounced sounder wisdom."

"Alas, Lavendale, I wish with all my heart you

could find one to love whose mere *eidolon* should be strong enough to guard and guide you."

"To keep my feet from Chocolate Houses and my tongue from libertine discourse, eh, Herrick? Nay, old friend, there is no such woman. The one I love is of the world, worldly. Were she free to wed me, I would do all that man dare do to win her: but she is not free, and I can but amuse myself in the paths of foolishness."

"You are ruining your health, wasting your fortune, and I doubt if even at this cost you have bought happiness."

"No, Herrick, it is not to be bought so cheap. 'Tis a thing I have never known since my first youth, when I began to find out the inside of the apples of Sodom. Dust and ashes, friend: life is all dust and ashes, when once the curiosity of youth is satisfied and the novelty of sinful pleasures is worn off, if you call it sinful to drink and play deep, and to love the company of handsome unscrupulous women, which I do not."

"If your mother were living, Jack, she whom you loved so well, whose memory I have heard you

say is more sacred to you than anything else on the earth, would you have lived the life you are leading now?"

"It would have vexed that pure and gentle spirit, Herrick, to see me as I am. Well, perhaps for her sake—yes, I have often told myself I should have been a better man had she lived—perhaps for her sake I might have forsworn sack and lived cleanly. But she is gone—she is at rest, where my follies cannot touch her."

"How do you know that? Have you not spoken to me of the influence of the dead upon the living? Do you not think that in the after life there may be consciousness of the sins and sorrows of those that the dead have loved better than they ever loved themselves? Do you think the chain of love is so weak that death snaps it?"

"The after life! Ah, Herrick, that is the question in which we are all at fault. It is uncertainty about that after life which damns us here. Better to fear hell than to be without hope beyond the grave. I swear, Herrick, I should be ever so much happier if I believed in the devil."

"And in God."

"That needs not saying. We all want to believe in a God, but we shirk the notion of a devil. Now I would accept Satan in all his integrity could I but believe in the rest of the spiritual world, angels and archangels, and all the hierarchy of heaven. If I could think that my mother's spirit hovered near me, could be vexed by my follies or moved by my penitence, that sweet spiritual influence would guard me from evil far better than any sublunary love. If I could believe, Herrick—but it is that damnable *if* which wrecks us."

"Do you not think, Jack, that it would pay a man to be a good Christian on speculation?"

"You mean that the satisfaction of living a decent life, the consciousness of moral rectitude, and the better conduct of his affairs, would recompense him for the pains of self-denial, and that he would have the chance of future reward—say as one to ninety-nine—by way of bonus."

"Ah, Jack, you are incorrigible. Bolingbroke and his disciple Voltaire have corrupted you."

"No, Herrick, I am no idle echo of other men's

doubts. I hear his lordship and the Frenchman bandy the ball of infidelity, scoff at all creeds and all believers, quote Collins and Woolston, discredit Abraham, and make light of Moses; prove the absurdity of all miracles, the fatuity of all Christians. But it was in the depths of my own heart, in the silence of my own chamber, that doubt first entered: and, like the devil that came to Dr. Faustus in Marlowe's play, once having entered, the intruder was not to be banished. That heaven which you Christians talk of with such easy assurance, looking forward to your residence there as placidly as a wealthy cit looks forward to a mansion at Clapham or a cottage at Islington—that golden Jerusalem—is for me girt with a wall of brass that shuts out hope and belief."

"Your mind will change some day, Jack."

"*Then* I shall begin to believe in miracles."

This was but one of the many conversations which the friends had held upon the same subject. Let their lives or their creeds differ never so much, they were always staunch and loyal to each other. Whatever new hopes might gladden Herrick's path-

way, the companion of his wild youth must be ever to him as a dearly loved brother.

At Whitsuntide the House was up, and Herrick was his own master for a week. He was to spend part of the time at Lavendale Manor, but not all his holiday. He had other business for some portion of the week, and that business took him to Tunbridge Wells.

He had read in one of the fashionable journals, the *Flying Post,* that Lady Tredgold and her daughters were staying at the Wells; and he happened to have just at this time a desire to renew his acquaintance with her ladyship, albeit she had done her very best to snub him.

"Perhaps, now I am member for Bossiney, and supposed to stand well with Sir Robert, she may be more civil," he said to himself.

He was not mistaken in his conjecture. He met the lady and her daughters promenading the Pantiles next day, and was received with cordiality. His fame had reached the Bath, where he had been talked of as one of the rising young men of the

day. Walpole's favour, his own success in the House, had been alike exaggerated by the many-tongued goddess, and Lady Tredgold, who last winter had esteemed him an insufficient match for her wealthy niece, was, in this merry month of May, inclined to look upon him as a tolerable suitor for her dowerless elder daughter, whose charms had been on the wane for the last three years, and whom the Bath and the Wells had alike rejected from the list of toasts and belles.

Mrs. Amelia herself was disposed to smile upon any gentleman of moderate abilities and good appearance, and she shone radiantly upon Herrick, who was something more than good-looking, for he had that indefinable air of superior intellect which comes of a thoughtful life, and which is always interesting to women. Mrs. Amelia piqued herself upon being intellectually superior to the common herd, and welcomed a congenial spirit. And then Herrick came fresh from the town, and was well up in all those fashionable scandals and tittle-tattlings which are agreeable even to women of mind.

Mr. Durnford and the ladies paraded side by side

for three or four turns—nodded and smirked at their acquaintance, as who should say, "Here is as finished a beau as you will find in all Tunbridge just dropped into our net; would you not like to know who he is?"

Lady Tredgold was monstrously civil, and invited the new arrival to tea. Herrick knew this would mean an evening at quadrille, but he had a few guineas in his purse and was not afraid of the encounter. He was willing to lose his money to her ladyship as the easiest way of putting her in a good temper. So he went straight from the Pantiles to her ladyship's lodgings, which were small and even shabby, which disadvantages Lady Tredgold deprecated with her easiest air.

"We were glad to get a shelter for our poor heads," she exclaimed; "the place is so crowded for the holidays, and the fine spring weather has brought all the world to the Wells. The lodging-house people charge exorbitantly for their hovels, and I assure you we pay a fortune for these wretched holes of ours, in which I am positively ashamed to receive you, my dear Mr. Durnford. However, I am

told that in King Charles's time people of quality were content to pig in movable cabins that were wheeled about the common at the pleasure of their owners; so I suppose we should be prodigiously pleased with a parlour that is at least wind and weather proof."

The tea-table was served with a certain air of elegance, as Lady Tredgold had brought some of the family plate from Bath, together with a set of Nankin cups and saucers. Durnford sipped the delicately-flavoured pekoe and gossiped with the three ladies, while the sun sank in a bed of crimson glory behind the hillocky common, and the blackbirds and thrushes sang their evening hymns in the thickets and copses that skirted the little town.

"Have you seen my cousin Irene lately, Mr. Durnford?" asked Sophia suddenly.

She was nearer thirty than she cared to be, but still ranked as the young hoyden sister, and was distinguished for making silly speeches.

"I think, Mrs. Sophia, you must know that I am forbidden to approach that young lady," answered

Herrick, while the mother frowned upon her younger hope.

"Indeed, but I didn't know, so I didn't. And why ain't you let see my cousin?" asked the innocent girl.

"Because I was once so bold as to aspire to her hand. I waited upon the Squire as one gentleman should upon another, and put my suit in the plainest way, but I was rejected with contumely. Yet in point of family the Durnfords may fairly rank with the Bosworths, and it is but sordid lucre which makes the barrier between us."

"My dear sir, that sordid lucre is the most insurmountable barrier that can divide hearts nowadays," exclaimed her ladyship, with an air of good-natured candour. "Look at my two girls. They have had their admirers, I can assure you, and among the prettiest fellows in town. They have been sighed for, and almost died for, by gentlemen whose admiration was an honour. But then came family considerations; fathers intervened; and when it was found out that my poor chicks would have but two thousand pound apiece out of his lordship's

estate, and would have to wait for even that pittance till his lordship's death, their lovers were forbidden to carry the business any further, and fond and faithful hearts were parted."

The two young ladies sighed and shook their heads plaintively, as if each had her history.

"If you are wise you will give up all thought of Irene," continued Lady Tredgold. "My brother-in-law worships money and rank. He will either marry his daughter to a peer or a millionaire. I know that he has set his heart upon founding a great family. I fancy he would like best to get some poor sprig of nobility like your friend Lavendale, who would assume his wife's name—call himself Lavendale-Bosworth, or Lavendale and Bosworth, by letters patent, or sink the old name altogether, and become plain Lord Bosworth."

"My friend will sell neither himself nor his name, madam," answered Durnford. "I know that he had a profound admiration for your niece's beauty and sweet simplicity of mind and manners."

"Simplicity! Yes, she is simple enough, to be sure!" ejaculated Amelia.

"But I have reason to know that his heart was too deeply involved in a former attachment—"

"My good sir, we all know that," exclaimed her ladyship impatiently. "We know it as well as that my royal mistress, dear stupid old Anne, is dead and buried. Lord Lavendale's passion for Lady Judith Topsparkle has been town talk for the last four years: and since last winter's masquerades and assemblies there have been as many bets among the wits and beaux as to whether she will or will not run away with him as ever there are upon the result of a race. But pray what has that to do with the question? If he is a sensible young man, he will mend his morals and his fortune at the same time by marrying my niece. Providence must mean their estates to be one, and they would be the handsomest couple in London."

"I have so much respect for Mrs. Bosworth as to believe she would die rather than give her hand where she could not give her heart," said Durnford.

"O, these girls all talk of dying, they all protest and whimper and pout," said Lady Tredgold. "But

they have to obey their fathers in the end, and then somehow it falls out that they are monstrously fond of their husbands, and you will see a couple who have been brought together by harsh fathers and the tyranny of circumstance transformed after marriage into such doating lovers as to sicken the town by their endearments and silly praises of each other. No girl should ever be allowed to have her own way in the disposal of herself or her fortune."

"You talk, madam, like Lady Capulet."

"If I do, it is unawares, sir, for I have not the honour of that lady's acquaintance. Will you do me the favour to ring for candles, Mr. Durnford? My people neglect us in these strange quarters. Perhaps you would be agreeable to join us in a hand at quadrille, if you have nothing better to do with the next hour."

Herrick protested that there could not be any better employment for his evening. Her ladyship's people consisted of a man and a maid. The candles were brought by the man, who put out the cards and set the table with the air of performing a nightly duty; and the ladies and their beau sat down to

that favourite and scientific game which preceded "whisk" in fashion and popularity.

"I am told the old Duchess of Marlborough prefers roly-poly to quadrille or ombre," said Herrick, as the cards were being dealt.

"O, there is a vein of vulgarity in that old woman which shows itself in everything she does," replied Lady Tredgold scornfully. "I detest the virago."

"And yet there is an element of greatness in her character," said Herrick. "Great talents, great beauty, great fortune, have all been hers: and she has been conspicuous in an age of lax morality as a woman of spotless virtue."

"O sir, it is an ill thing perhaps for any woman to say in the presence of unmarried daughters, but I own I agree with Joseph Addison that a woman has no right to practise every other vice on the ground that she possesses one virtue, even though that virtue of chastity is, I grant you, the chief merit in woman."

"I am with you there, madam, and agree that even sad Lucretia's modesty would scarce justify a woman in shrewing her husband, maligning her

innocent granddaughter, and quarrelling with every member of her family: and yet I own to some touch of half-reluctant admiration for the mighty Sarah. Mr. Cibber told me once how it was his task to attend upon her at a supper in Nottingham Castle, about the time of King James's flight from this kingdom, and that her beauty appeared to him as an emanation of Divinity, rather than a mere earthly loveliness. And then she is such a magnificent virago. The woman who had the spunk to cut off her splendid tresses, the chief glory of her womanhood, and fling them across her husband's path in a freak of temper—"

"Was a hot-tempered simpleton, and I dare swear repented her wilfulness the moment 'twas done," said Mrs. Amelia. "All I know of the great Duchess is that she never deserved to have an all-conquering hero for her husband and a queen for her bosom friend."

"The handsomest, most fascinating man in Europe, into the bargain," said Mrs. Sophia. "Lord Chesterfield told me that all the graces met in the Duke of Marlborough's person."

"Very generous of his lordship," said Durnford. "It is rarely that an ugly man can appreciate masculine beauty."

"O, Chesterfield is a very obliging person," replied her ladyship, "and I am told they are delighted with him at the Hague. He will introduce the idea of elegance into the Dutch mind."

"Nay, madam," remonstrated Herrick, "it is not to be supposed that your Hollander is entirely devoid of elegance, or that Amsterdam has less appreciation of the beautiful than Athens had. It is only that in the Low Countries beauty takes a homelier form, and shows itself in an extremity of neatness and gracefulness of form in trifles—quaint architecture, shining hundred-paned lattices, every inch of ironwork deftly worked—cabinet pictures—brass and copper vessels — and cleanliness everywhere. There were streets and houses in Holland that enchanted me, even while my mind was still charged with pictures of Italy."

"I hate everything Dutch except their crockery and their furniture," said Lady Tredgold.

The game now began in earnest, and mother

and daughters were soon absorbed in their cards. They played with all the intensity of practised gamesters; and though they only staked crown-pieces, they had an air as if life and death hung on the balance. They were much keener and perhaps better players than Herrick, who on this particular occasion played with reprehensible carelessness. He and his partner, Mrs. Amelia, lost steadily, whereupon the damsel gave him many a reproachful look, as her best cards were wasted by his bad play. At last, after a series of short impatient sighs and tappings of red-heeled shoes, the young lady flung down her cards in a passion. Even the knowledge that her mother and sister were spoiling the Egyptian was no consolation to her for the loss of her own coin, her kindred being female Harpagons in the exaction of their due.

"Pray forgive me, madam; I fear my wits were wandering," pleaded Herrick, with a penitent air. "In sober truth I am no lover of cards, and in pleasant company can scarce keep my mind to the game. I ought never to play with ladies—grace

and beauty are dangerous distractions from the mathematics of quadrille."

Mrs. Amelia looked mollified, and took the whole of the compliment to herself. Lady Tredgold and Sophia were in admirable humour, for their pockets were weighed down by Mr. Durnford's crown-pieces. "We will play no more this evening," said her ladyship gaily; "my Amelia's temper is always impetuous at cards. It is her only failing, dear child, and she is too candid to hide her feelings. The band is to play to-night on the common. What if we put on our hoods, girls, and take a turn in the moonlight? Perhaps Mr. Durnford would escort us?"

Durnford avowed himself delighted at the privilege, so the three ladies muffled their powdered heads in black silk hoods, elegant with much ruching of lace and ribbon, and put on their cloaks. It was a lovely spring night, with the moon at the full, and all the fashionable visitors were promenading in little groups of two and three in the cool sweet air. A ripple of laughter, a babble of cheerful voices, mingled with the sound of the band, which was performing airs

from Handel's last opera. Nothing could have been prettier than that picture of moonlit common, and little town built irregularly on the ridge of a low hill, scattered houses, quaint roofs, steeple and belfry, assembly rooms and baths, and the very smallest thing in the way of theatres, where great stars from London shone out now and then, a brief coruscation.

Mrs. Amelia was enchanted with the scene. She put on an air of almost infantine gaiety, and made as if she could have skipped for joy.

"It is ever so much prettier than the Bath," she cried. "Those great stone houses clustering round the Abbey have such a dismal look. The town seems to lie in the bottom of a pit. But here it is all open and airy, and so pretty and tiny, like a box of toys."

She and Durnford were a little way in advance of the other two, and their conversation had the air of a *tête-à-tête*.

"Is it really true that you have not seen my cousin since she was in London?" she asked presently, growing serious all at once. She was at that

desperate stage in the existence of an idle, aimless, almost portionless woman, when to secure a husband is the one supreme object in life, and she had been thinking about Durnford all the evening from a matrimonial point of view. She saw in him the possibility of rescue from that dismal swamp of neglected spinsterhood in which she had waded so long. He was good-looking, well-bred, intellectual, and he was making his way in the world. What more could she hope for now in any suitor? The day for high hopes was long past. She knew that her mother and sister would rejoice to be rid of her, that her father would give her a hundred pounds or so, grudgingly, to buy gowns, and his blessing, with an air that would make it seem almost a curse. What could be expected from a genteel pauper tortured by chronic gout?

Full of vague hopes, she wanted to be certain of her ground, to be at least sure that all was over between Herrick and Irene. He paused so long before answering her question, that she was fain to repeat it.

"Is it really, really true?"

"True that I have not seen your cousin since she left London? Nay, madam, I am sure I never said as much. I only said I was forbidden to see her."

"That was a sophistical answer. Then you have seen her?"

"Do you want to get me into trouble, to make me betray myself and a lady? I will tell you this much, Mrs. Amelia: my suit seems just as hopeless to-night as it seemed last winter."

"Then don't you see that mamma is right—that it would be folly to pin all your hopes upon a girl who will be sold to the first gouty old duke or marquis who will do my uncle the honour to propose for her? But I believe you are still desperately in love with her."

"Six months' severance have not schooled me to forget her."

Amelia bit her lips, and tossed her head contemptuously. To think that a chit like that should possess the soul of a serious man past thirty, a man who should have chosen a sensible woman near

his own age, if he wanted to be happy, and to make a figure in the world! Men are such idiots!

There was a bench near a cluster of hawthorn-trees on the common, and here Lady Tredgold and her younger daughter had seated themselves. It was at the end of the parade which the little world of Tunbridge had made for itself this season. Next year, perhaps, they would choose another spot for their promenade; fashion is so capricious.

As Amelia and her beau approached, the anxious mother beckoned with her fan. The dear young thing must not walk too long with her swain. That *tête-à-tête* patrolling might be remarked, and might spoil other chances. Maternal anxiety was perpetually on the alert.

"You must be tired, child," said her ladyship, as the promenaders drew near. "You have been running about all day."

Running about seemed a somewhat youthful phrase for a damsel of thirty, who wore three-inch heels and a hoop that would have handicapped Daphne. But Amelia made no objection, and seated

herself at her mother's side, leaving ample space for Durnford.

The music came to them softened by distance, and the perfume of gorse and wild flowers was here untainted by the mixed odours of snuff and pulvilio which prevailed where the company clustered thicker.

"I have been finding out Mr. Durnford's secrets, mamma," said Amelia, with a laboured sprightliness. "He is still over head and ears in love with my young cousin."

"Indeed, child! But how durst you question or tease him?" returned the mother reprovingly. "Surely the gentleman has a right to be in love with whomsoever he pleases; and if his case is hopeless, it is not for us to remind him of his misfortunes."

"I can but wonder that amidst the galaxy of our Court belles Mr. Durnford could be dazzled by a star of secondary magnitude like Irene."

"To me, Mrs. Amelia, she appeared ever as Alpha, the first and the brightest."

"And do you really think her pretty?"

"Much more than pretty; that adjective would

apply to a milliner's apprentice tripping down St. James's Street with a hat-box. Irene is to my mind the very incarnation of girlish loveliness."

"Surely her nose is too long."

"Not the infinitesimal fraction of an inch. Her nose is as perfect as Diana's. Praxiteles never moulded a more delicate feature. I know that ladies have a friendly good-humoured way of taking each other's charms and attractions to pieces, like the bits of a toy puzzle, and discussing and cheapening every feature; but all the feminine detraction that was ever uttered over a tea-table, out of sheer good-humour, would not lessen my admiration of Miss Bosworth by one tittle."

"She has a very handsome face," said Lady Tredgold, with a decided air, as if to put a stop to triviality, "but she has no figure."

"She does not exhibit her person to all the world, as so many of our fashionable beauties have a habit of doing," replied Durnford.

His heart was beating fast and furiously. He had brought the conversation—or it had in somewise drifted—to the very point which might serve his

purpose, and he had a serious purpose in this philandering with Lady Tredgold and her daughters.

"My dear sir, it is useless to play the moralist in such an age as ours," retorted her ladyship impatiently. "If women have fine statuesque shoulders they will show them, and if they are ill-made or scraggy—which I thank Heaven neither of my girls are—they will order their gowns to be cut high and make a monstrous merit of modesty. My niece is not actually ill-made—her poor mother had an exquisite shape—but she is a willowy slip of a child with an undeveloped figure. Compare her, for instance, with your friend Lady Judith Topsparkle."

"Lady Judith is lovely, I grant," replied Durnford, "but your ladyship can hardly admire the lavish display of her charms to all the world. There was an artistic suggestion of nakedness in her loose Turkish robe at the masquerade last winter which provoked remarks I would rather not hear about any woman I respect—as I do Lady Judith. It would torture me to hear my wife so talked about."

"Should you be lucky enough to marry my cousin Irene, you need never fear too lavish a display

of her shoulders," said Amelia cantankerously. "Be sure she will always cover them decently, especially her *right* shoulder."

"Come, come, child, there are things that should not be babbled about, however good-naturedly," remonstrated Lady Tredgold.

"Do you mean to insinuate that she is deformed?" asked Durnford, more intent than ever.

"No, she is straight enough, but she has a very ugly scar on her right shoulder, which will oblige her to maintain the exalted character for modesty which you give her till her dying day. There is such a thing, you see, Mr. Durnford, as making a virtue of necessity," added Amelia viperishly.

"A scar!" repeated Durnford; "the result of some accident in childhood, I conclude?"

"No doubt," answered her ladyship. "It looks like the cicatrice left by a very severe burn; but when I questioned my niece about it she could tell me nothing. The accident must have happened when she was almost a baby, for she has no memory of it."

"Did you never ask the Squire about it?"

"Never. His daughter was brought up in such a curious way until I found her a governess, that I fancy the matter must be rather a sore subject with my brother-in-law. In fact, his whole conduct as a husband and father was so strange that I could hardly trust myself to talk to him about his past life or his daughter's childhood. The presence of that odious woman—Mrs. Layburne, I think he calls her—in his house has always been an abomination to me; indeed, I doubt it helped to break my poor sister's heart. As to the child being neglected and coming to harm under the dominion of that woman, 'twas but natural, for no doubt the creature drinks. I am only surprised that she ever survived her infancy, as such a woman would be capable of murdering her in a fit of fury."

"Indeed, your ladyship, from what I have heard of Mrs. Layburne, I do not think she was unkindly disposed to Miss Bosworth," said Herrick. "She held herself aloof from all the household, sat and brooded in her own den, shut in from the world."

"'Twas her guilty conscience made her love solitude, no doubt. Hark! that is the last of the

band. They are playing Dr. Bull's loyal melody. It is ten o'clock, I declare. Will you come back to our lodgings, Mr. Durnford, and partake of a sandwich and a syllabub?"

"Your ladyship is too kind: but I have to leave by the early coach to-morrow morning, and I think I had best go straight back to my inn."

CHAPTER VII.

"IN PLAYHOUSE AND IN PARK ABOVE THE REST."

It was summer once again, the season of roses and nightingales, and London, generally empty at this golden time of sunshine and flowers, was, in this particular year of 1727, filled to overflowing with all those privileged people who had anything to expect from Court favour.

A new reign had begun. Suddenly, without a moment of warning, the Prince of Wales found himself king. He emerged in an instant from the shadow of paternal disfavour to the full blaze of regal power.

Strange, dramatic even, that death of the old King, lying stark and cold in that very chamber in which he was born—strange to awfulness that wild drive through the summer dust and glare, the stricken King refusing to let his chariot be stopped

for succour or rest; dozing in the arms of his faithful chamberlain, murmuring faintly in a brief moment of consciousness, "All is over with me;" gasping out with his last struggling breath, "Osnabrück, Osnabrück," to slavish courtiers and attendants who dared not question that kingly command: although his omnipotent majesty the King of Terrors rode shoulder to shoulder with their royal master. And thus in the deep of night that death-chariot arrived at Osnabrück, and the old bishop, Ernst August, clasped the cold hand of his royal brother.

The King died on Sunday, the 11th, old style, and the news reached Sir Robert Walpole at his dinner-table in Chelsea on Wednesday, the 14th. Quick work for the express who brought the tidings, in those days of villanous roads and sailing vessels. Sir Robert was said to have killed two horses between Chelsea and Richmond in his ride to the princely palace, doubtless a harmless exaggeration of good Gossip History. He received but scant civility from the new King—aroused from his customary after-dinner nap by the pleasing intelligence of his father's

fatal apoplexy—and was sent straight off to Chiswick, to take his directions from that dull, precise, and plodding politician, Sir Spencer Compton. The statesman thus curtly dismissed, the new King and new Queen scampered post-haste to their house in Leicester Fields, where no sooner was the news public than the square was filled with a seething mob, huzzaing for King George II., whilst the long suite of reception-rooms was thronged with courtiers and sycophants, male and female, all bowing down to the new Panjandrum, and all turning their backs upon poor Sir Robert, whose fall seemed a foregone conclusion to the meanest apprehension; for had not everybody about the Prince's person heard him talk of his father's prime minister as a rogue and a rascal for whom the Tower would be only too comfortable a prison-house? But while the giddy, light-thinking crowd rushed to Leicester Fields, to slaver King George and Queen Caroline, some of the deeper calculators paid their court to a lady who was deemed a better mark for service and flattery than either; and that was Mrs. Howard, the new Queen's very submissive waiting-woman, and

the new King's titular mistress, who was naturally supposed to rule him and to be as able to turn on the fountain of royal favour as ever Barbara Palmer or Louise de Querouailles had been in the easy-going days of good old Rowley.

"Strange how thoroughly beside the mark these simple souls all were," said Tom Philter, who by a kind of fox-like slyness always contrived to be on the right side. "They fancied that because that deaf and stupid middle-aged lady was the King's mistress she must needs be more powerful than his wife, although Queen Caroline is indisputably the finer woman by almost as wide a superiority as she is the cleverer. They concluded that the illicit tie must be the stronger, inasmuch as vice is generally pleasanter than virtue; and they did not take into consideration that our old sins are often as wearisome as respectability itself. I happened to know that in his Majesty's estimation Caroline's little finger is worth Mrs. Howard's whole body, and it was to her I dedicated my volume of odes and epigrams, 'Horace in a Periwig,' while she was Princess of Wales."

"It was a worse mistake to suppose that the new King could afford to dispense with the services of the greatest financier of modern times," said Durnford, who supplied occasional papers to the journal for which Mr. Philter was scrub, hack, and paragraph-writer, and who dined now and then at the Roebuck in Cheapside, a well-known Whig tavern where Philter spent much of his leisure, and where he heard most of the news which he was wont to attribute to far loftier sources. After all, it matters little whether a journalist gets his news at first, second, third, or fourth hand, so long as the facts he records can amuse and interest his readers. The more various the relaters of a story the more embellished the narrative.

"Ay, that was indeed a mistake. Yet if Sir Spencer had but had a little more gumption, he might have formed a new Cabinet with Townshend and Chesterfield, and sent Robin to the Tower. He let his opportunity slip; Sir Robert got the Queen's ear, and now his usefulness in the adjustment of the Civil List, by which both King and Queen get a larger income than any of their predecessors, has

made George and Caroline his obliged and humble servants for ever."

"What, sir, you would insinuate that Sir Robert Walpole has bought his King at the expense of his country?"

"O, he was always good at buying the votes and consciences of common folks; but it is not often a minister has so good an opportunity of giving a fancy price for his King. It was pleasant to hear Sir Robert plead his Majesty's increasing family and the high price of provisions as a reason why the Commons should be liberal."

"And the only opposition was from Mr. Shippen—Downright Shippen, as Pope called him—the Jacobite who ventured to describe the late King as a stranger to our language and constitution, and was sent to the Tower for his insolence," said Durnford.

"Well, there is one to whom his late Majesty's fatal apoplexy—caused, Dean Swift tells me, by a melon—has dealt a death-blow, one whom I could almost pity, unprincipled and shifty as he has ever been."

"Do you mean Bolingbroke?" asked Durnford.

"Whom else could I mean? The brightest, wisest, meanest of mankind. Assuredly he has quite as good a right to that description as Bacon ever had, though Pope, who adores him, would never believe it. How marvellously does his career illustrate that old vulgar saw which tells us honesty is the best policy! Never did Nature and fortune so smile upon a man as upon Harry St. John, who was Secretary at War at twenty, and Secretary of State at thirty, who had the ear of his Queen and the admiration of all England, and might have kept both could he only have been honest. Twice has death ruined his schemes when they were ripest. He had plotted to bring over the Chevalier, had the Stuart succession in his pocket as it were, the Queen on the very point of recognising her brother's claim; and lo! Death seizes his royal mistress, and grins at him across her shoulder. Again, but yesterday, when, after years of exile, still as keenly ambitious as in his brilliant youth, he had bought her Grace of Kendal's favour, and had his foot planted, ready to throw that stout wrestler Robin, again grim death intervenes and reduces the Duchess to a cipher:

and Lady Bolingbroke's hand-over of eleven thousand to the Duchess's niece has to be written down as a loss in the St. John ledger."

"O, but Bolingbroke got something for his money. But for that bribe to Lady Walsingham he might never have been able to come back to England, nor his wife, Madame de Vilette, to get her fortune out of Sir Matthew Decker's clutches, who pretended that, as Lord Bolingbroke's wife, her money was forfeited to the Crown under her husband's attainder. Whereupon Madame swore she was not married to his lordship, though all her friends knew she was; a perjury for which the banker should at least bear half the lady's punishment in Tartarus, whether it be vulture or wheel."

"My Lord Bolingbroke is not the only person who has lost by the old King's fatal apoplexy," said Philter. "There is the divorced Lady Macclesfield's daughter, brazen, beautiful Miss Brett, the only Englishwoman whom his Majesty ever condescended to admire, a regular Spanish beauty, black as Erebus, and with a temper to match. But no doubt you know her."

"I have seen her," said Durnford.

"That poor young lady loses a coronet. She was to have been made a countess on the King's return from Hanover, and she gave herself the airs of a queen in anticipation of her new dignity. And now death blasts her hopes; but as she is a fine woman with a fine fortune, I make no doubt she will find some convenient gentleman to marry her before long."

The new reign gave an impetus to the world of fashion which made that dazzling globe spin faster on its axis. There was a growing recklessness in expenditure among the aristocracy, albeit his Majesty King George II. was reputed the meanest of men, with a keener passion for counting his guineas than ever prince had for spending them; as economic a soul as that sturdy Hohenzollern, King Frederick William of Prussia, who had so clipped and pared and diminished the pay and pensions of courtiers, and the profits of Court harpies of all kinds, a few years ago when he came to his kingdom. King George could scarcely cut down his expenses with so free a hand, seeing his privy purse had been so well

filled for him; and Queen Caroline was a woman of cultivated mind and catholic tastes, the disciple and correspondent of Leibnitz, the patroness of Berkeley and Swift, the bosom friend of John Lord Hervey, and was disposed to do things in a grand style.

The Duchess of Kendal retired to her house near Hounslow, and mourned her royal lover in solitude, haunted by a raven in whose material presence her sentimental fancy recognised the spirit of the dead King. The younger Court was the focus of wit and beauty; Lady Hervey, Mrs. Campbell, *née* Bellingham, the Duchess of Kingston, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Swift, Gay, Hervey, Carteret, sparkled and coruscated there. That Court atmosphere pervaded the fashionable life of London.

In that world of fashion and folly Lady Judith Topsparkle shone with ever-increasing brilliancy, with ever-widening notoriety. She had chained the young French wit Arouet to her side, like a falcon on a lady's wrist, and held him captive. She had the grim Irish Dean for her friend and confidant. Bolingbroke swore he adored her only a little less than his wife: and Lady Bolingbroke, who knew her

lord's weakness for beauty, looked on with indulgence at those public coquettings which were too open to mean mischief. She knew that with her brilliant Harry gallantry might still prevail; but passion was a thing of the past. Had she not compared him to the ruin of a Roman aqueduct? A noble monument, but the water had long ceased to flow! Better that dear Henry should be composing epigrams or paying elaborate compliments to a frivolous young woman of rank than that his volatile fancy should be straying after an orange-seller, or some expensive Miss of the Anna Maria Gumley type — that insolent beauty who was said to have been once on the best possible terms with Harry St. John, and who was now the wife of Harry's friend, William Pulteney.

Mr. Topsparkle saw his wife's surroundings, and made no complaint. Among so many admirers there was no suspicion of a serious lover. It pleased him that when the French wit had refused his much-desired company to some of the finest houses in London, he was to be found in Soho Square—that Lord Bolingbroke would post all the way from

Dawley, and go back after midnight by a dark road, in order to dine with Lady Judith and her set; it pleased him that Swift should glower and grumble in front of his hearth, pretending to despise all mankind, yet at heart the supplest courtier of them all, cringing to Lady Suffolk and fawning upon the Queen, negotiating the gift of a poplin gown to that royal lady with as much pains as if it had been the treaty of Hanover, hoping, despairing, plotting, hating, with a fiercer passion than is common to common men. Before Swift's scathing tongue and Swift's awful frown, even Lady Judith bowed her lofty crest. She fawned upon him, as he fawned upon the Queen and prime minister, and as the dog fawns upon his master, conscious of an undeniable superiority. With Voltaire she might presume to trifle—that light mocking nature of his encouraged trifling; but with Swift she was ever serious. And the Dean was himself of an unusually gloomy temper at this time, dangerous alike to friend and enemy, sparing no one with that bitter tongue of his, finding no pleasure in the things that pleased other people. Lord Bolingbroke said 'twas his tenderness of heart

which made him such a savage. He was plunged in gloom on account of his sweet companion and *protégée*, Mrs. Johnson, who was slowly sinking into the grave.

"Which he has dug for her," said Voltaire, who knew the story. "I do not wonder that your famous Irish wit has his dark moments, or that his thoughts sometimes waver between the woman whose heart is broke and the woman whose heart is breaking. I am quite ready to admit, with his lordship and Mr. Pope, that Swift is a staunch friend, and the cleverest squib-writer in Europe: I prostrate myself before a genius greater even than Rabelais; but I cannot esteem him a generous lover."

"Do you not think he may have suffered even more than these simple, tender-hearted creatures, who were too officious in their love and too feeble in their sorrow?" speculated Bolingbroke. "I doubt that great heart of his has been wrung in many a silent agony. He loved Stella from her childhood with a protecting fatherly affection—"

"I always mistrust fatherly affection in a man who is not a father," interjected Voltaire.

"And if his fancy sometimes trifled in playful endearments," continued his lordship, "as even a father might trifle with his best-beloved child, I doubt if he was ever betrayed into a direct avowal of love. And then, touched and flattered by Vanessa's worship—"

"His fatherly affection found another daughter in the amiable heiress, a daughter at whose table he dined agreeably two or three times a week," said Voltaire. "Your Dean had ever a thrifty mind. I remember, my lord, your capital story of trapping him into paying for an inn dinner—how his reverence resented the bite. And he found new endearments and a new name for this wealthy Dutch lady, and somewhat neglected his elder daughter in her favour, and wrote a poem to celebrate their learned loves, and fooled the innocent fond creature into the belief she was to be Mrs. Dean—only to enlighten her with savage bluntness one day when she had dared to interrogate her rival, wishing with a natural curiosity to know which of them had the strongest claim upon Cadenus. He frowned her into an ague of terror that ended in her untimely death, and so

freed himself of an importunate adorer; but I doubt if he has been particularly happy since that last look from despairing Vanessa. Should Providence ever give me such fond affection from an intelligent woman I would be her slave, would endure her every caprice, bear with her even were she the veriest termagant. There is no limit to the debt of gratitude which a man of honour owes to the woman who loves him."

"Would you have gratitude go so far as to wink at infidelity?" asked Bolingbroke, possibly with some lingering remembrance of the fair and faithless Clara, whose inconstant soul could not keep true even to Henry St. John in his noontide of youth and wit and beauty.

Lady Judith admired Swift and adored Voltaire. That airy sarcastic nature suited her temper to a marvel. The Frenchman's presence gave a philosophic air to her receptions. The talk was of Descartes and Berkeley, of Leibnitz and Newton, and of those smaller spluttering lights, forgotten now, that transient coruscation of learned atheism, which illumined the earlier half of the eighteenth

century. The talk was of Moses and the opera-house, wavering betwixt legislation from Sinai and Heidegger's latest prima donna: and Judith had something to say about everything, were the subject ever so lofty and remote from woman's scope, or so low as to be tainted by foulness and unfit for a woman's discussion. Her arrogance attacked the highest themes; her audacity recoiled not from the lowest. Her manners had the light insolence of Millamant, secure in sensuous charms and mental superiority.

Mr. Topsparkle looked on and admired. Yes, this was the woman for whom he had sighed, having long ago outworn that kind of love which requires reciprocity in the object. Lady Judith's calm civility and ladylike tolerance sufficed him, her airs and graces and elegant insolence to all mankind enchanted him. So long as she was faithful, and injured his self-esteem by no preference for another, he was content. She might not love him, but she was the chief sultana of his harem, and had so far conducted herself as a sultana without speck or reproach.

He had heard old stories about Lavendale: how

he and Judith had loved fiercely and fondly, made themselves the talk of the town for at least three weeks, an elopement seemingly impending, a furious father threatening direst vengeance, and much talk of coaches-and-six waiting at street-corners on those moonless nights when London was abandoned to darkness and the linkman; he had heard how they had quarrelled and parted on account of Chichinette; and he was resigned to know that there was this one romantic and even blameworthy page in his wife's history. Knowing as much, he had been studiously civil to Lavendale, and had gone so far as to invite him to Ringwood. It pleased that crafty soul of his to have his *ci-devant* rival under his roof, and to be able to watch him keenly. He had so watched, and had seen nothing amiss. And now, as this first season of King George II.'s reign wore on, Mr. Topsparkle was content that his wife's former lover should make one in her cluster of satellites, should hand her fan, or advise her play at ombre or quadrille, at tray-ace or basset.

"My wife has a whole kennel of puppies perpetually sprawling at her feet," he said one night to

a circle of friends at White's Chocolate-house, "of whom Bolingbroke is chief bow-wow, now that her old admirer, Chesterfield, is at the Hague. Who would take that brilliant trifler, Harry St. John, for Walpole's most malignant foe, and the boldest conspirator that ever hatched treason; or who would suppose that this modern Cincinnatus, who pretends to have renounced politics in favour of hayforks, is in reality the chief of the Opposition, the busy plotting brain of which Wyndham and the Pulteneys are but the mouthpieces?"

At the opera and at the opera-house masquerades, Judith and Lavendale were often together, but they were rarely alone. It would have almost seemed as if anything more than the lightest flirtation must have been impossible under such conditions. And yet under that light demeanour, deep in the hearts of both of them, there glowed a passionate love; and yet amidst that maelstrom of pleasure, that wild and wicked whirlpool of cards and dice, and lascivious talk, and idlest vanity, and profligate extravagance, to each one of these impassioned

lovers it seemed as if the world held only that one other—for Judith, Lavendale; for Lavendale, Judith. That crowded, bustling outer world and all its inhabitants showed shadowy as the throng of supernumerary witches in *Macbeth*. In the constant intoxication of a passionate love, Judith saw all faces dimly, heard all voices faintly, moved and spoke and smiled and played her pretty part as woman of quality and fashion, with mere automatic movements, doing the right thing at the right moment by mere force of habit, as a creature too well brought up to err against the code of politeness either by omission or commission. Never was she lovelier in Bolingbroke's eyes than as he sat beside her at dinner one summer afternoon, drinking deep of Mr. Topsparkle's choicest champagne, and delighted at the idea that the graces of his maturer manhood had power to captivate so charming a woman. And yet all the while it was as much as Judith knew with whom she was talking, since her ears and eyes and the fitful fluttering of her heart were all for him whose hand had snatched and pressed hers surreptitiously in the little bustle at

entering the dining-room, and who now sat at the further end of the table, pretending to be interested in an alderman's account of Sir Robert Walpole's latest attack upon the privileges and liberties of the City.

The company at dinner were numerous, including Lady Polwhele and the Asterleys, Mrs. Asterley improved in manners and worldly wisdom by a winter in good society, and by many very sharp reproofs from the Dowager. Little Tom Philter had been bidden, as a man who must be tolerated occasionally, lest he should spit venom at one's fair name in the newspapers. Lady Judith was beginning to be sensitive about seeing her name in print, and was growing monstrously civil to the Grub Street fraternity. She had been written about and hinted at for her high play and her passion for lotteries. She had been the subject—designated by initials—of a ballad headed "*On revient toujours*," and she had been told that Mr. Pope had hit her character off to the life in an essay now in course of composition. The sketch had been read to privileged friends every word told; her virtues and failings were per

petuated by that unerring touch which made mere words seem as round and fixed and perfect as a statue in marble. This afternoon, while they were dining, she taxed Bolingbroke with having seen and approved the satire.

"Dearest Lady Judith, do you think I could approve one word of depreciation, were you the subject?" protested his lordship. "Our little friend certainly showed me some lines—bright, incisive, antithetical, in his usual style; for though he laughs at Hervey's seesaw, he is not himself averse from the false glitter of antithesis—lines descriptive of a modish beauty, Belinda married perhaps; but they could no more represent *you* than they could embody a goddess. Who can describe the undescribable?"

"I am growing accustomed to malevolence," said Judith, "and from little men it gives me no pain. But I have admired Mr. Pope as a wit and a genius, and I should not like to see myself lampooned by him."

"I will make him send you the page to-morrow, and it shall be cancelled if you disapprove a single line."

"You are always chivalrous. I saw some verses of yours the other day, addressed to some young person who seems to have been not quite a woman of quality; and they are so pretty that I could but regret your lordship had ever ceased to cultivate the Muses."

"I have found those famous ladies like other women, dear madam, mightily inconstant. What lines of mine could you have seen, I wonder?"

The world-famous statesman, the masterly writer, smiled with the gratified air of a school-boy scribbler at this praise of his juvenile verses.

"O, it was a mere bagatelle, an address to a lady whose Christian name was Clara. The lines had the flavour of youth, and must have been written ages ago. 'Twas the fervid feeling of the ose that pleased me:

> 'To virtue thus, and to thyself restored,
> By all admired, by me alone adored,
> Be to thy Harry ever kind and true,
> And live for him who more than dies for you.'

I hope Clara was worthy of that tender appeal."

"She was not, madam. She was a—nay, I dare

not tell you what she was; but Henry St. John might have been a better man if Clara had been a better woman. There is no such blight upon a young heart as to discover it has given itself to an unworthy mistress; to love on, blindly, madly, long after the object is known to be false and worthless; to hope against hope, to forgive again and again, only to be again and again offended; to accept every lie rather than face the horrid truth that one is betrayed; to tear a false love out of one's heart as mandrakes are torn from earth, with wounds and shriekings. Can the man who loves and is loved by beauty and virtue ever enough esteem his own happiness or his mistress's merit? I who have loved lewdness and deceit will answer that he never can. His blessings are beyond and above all computation. His gratitude should be as infinite."

The company were to repair to the new Spring Garden, otherwise Vauxhall, soon after dinner, and the weather being exquisite for such excursions, it had been decided that they were to go by water. Their chairs would carry them to Westminster, and thence a barge would convey them to Vauxhall.

The excursion had been devised by Lady Polwhele, who was always ready for any dissipation, and who spent as much of her handsome income as she could spare from the gaming-table upon pleasure and fine company. She had invited herself and her satellites to dine in Soho, and she had invited Mr. Topsparkle and his guests to sup at Vauxhall, where there were snug little arbours with curious signs —the Checker, King's Head, Dragon, Royal George —where cosy little parties supped cheerily on minced chicken and champagne or hung beef and Burton ale. Here, a few years ago, the Mohawks had made many a raid, storming the arbours where women were supping unattended, struggling for kisses with slender girls or portly matrons, pulling off masks and rumpling silk hoods, smashing punch-bowls and upsetting tables. Here Lavendale had been leader of many a fray. But he was tamed now, and full of other thoughts as he sat in the barge watching the sunset paint the river, while Lady Polwhele and Mrs. Asterley talked at the top of their voices, and while Judith pretended to listen to the honeyed tones of Bolingbroke or the vinegar treble

of Mr. Topsparkle, who was grumbling at the soft west wind which breathed coolness along the rippling water, and threatened him with a return of his rheumatism.

"You should not have come with us if you were afraid of catching cold," said Judith impatiently.

"Upon my word, you are vastly civil. You drag a man at your heels like a spaniel to every foolish place of—no-entertainment—and then tell him he should have stayed at home."

"'Twas Lady Polwhele made the party, not I."

"Where you go I must go," answered Topsparkle, in a lowered voice; "your remnant of reputation must be cared for by somebody. You do nothing to preserve it."

"Nor will *you* maintain it by playing spy or gaoler," retorted Judith scornfully. "Had you not better call a boat and go back to Westminster? I shall be at home soon after midnight. I promise you not to elope with Lord Bolingbroke. I have too much regard for his charming French wife."

"I am not afraid of your eloping—with Boling-

broke," said Topsparkle grimly. He folded his roquelaure across his chest and leaned back against the cushions, with the determined air of a man who does not mean to be tricked by a coquette. Lady Judith was reckless, and her husband was not so blind as he pretended to be, or as the town thought him. Above all things he was watchful, but his watchfulness rarely avowed itself as plainly as to-night. Judith glanced at him uneasily, wondering at this little blaze of unexpected fire, this sudden spurt of jealousy on the part of one who had so long seemed the personification of well-bred indifference.

The stars were up when Lady Judith's party landed, stars above in a clear summer heaven, and below the twinkling radiance of a thousand lampions, tiny glimmering glass cups of oil in which burnt the feeblest of wicks, and yet in those days esteemed a splendid illumination. Perhaps the gardens, with their bosquets and little wildernesses—in which 'twas said a mother might lose herself while she was looking for her daughter—were all the pleasanter lit by those tremulous

glowworm lamps, mere dots of brightness amidst the shadowy leafage. For lovers or for intrigue of all kinds they were ever so much better adapted than the cold searching glare of electric lamps. That dimly lighted garden, with its music of nightingales, was the chosen trysting-place of lovers, high and low, fortunate or unhappy. Forbidden loves found here their safest rendezvous; elopements and Fleet marriages were planned by the dozen every night the gardens opened. Here adventurers sought their prey; and here rich widows surrendered to penniless ensigns or cureless clerics, third-rate actors or Grub Street scribblers, as the case might be. The band was playing a *pot-pourri* from Handel's favourite operas in the gayest part of the garden, where the company who had no intrigues on hand were parading with a stately air, fluttering fans, shrugging shoulder-knots, and exchanging small-talk. Above those darker walks where lovers strolled softly, the nightingales poured forth their melancholy melodies, lovelier even than those of Handel. And in one of these wilderness walks, between eleven o'clock and midnight, Judith and Lavendale were gliding

ghost-like among the shadows, her hand within his arm, her head inclining towards, nay, almost resting against, his shoulder.

"Let it be soon, love," he was pleading; "soon, at once, to-night, this night of all nights, night for ever blessed, as that when Jove stopped the sun—would I were Jove, for love's sake! Let us fly to-night. Post-horses to Dover, through the summer night; how sweet a journey, between fields of clover and budding hops, and the young corn waving silvery under silver stars! I have travelled that road so often in desolation, when I had only Nature to comfort me, that I think I know every field and every copse. Let me make the journey for once in bliss, with my beloved in my arms. Then to-morrow 'tis but to charter a cutter, and across to any port we may settle upon; then southward as the swallows fly, and as lightly as they. We would not stop till we came to Cintra, where I know of a villa amidst orange and lemon trees, that is like a bower in paradise. Glimpses of the sea shine up at one through every break in the foliage, far, far below, wondrously beautiful. It is a place where I have

wandered for hours, thinking of you, in a rapture of melancholy."

"It would be sweet to be there with you, dear love," she murmured, in low languid tones.

His arm was round her waist, her head upon his bosom, and a nightingale was singing close by, as if their love had made itself a living voice.

"It would be heaven, dearest," he answered eagerly; "why then should we delay? Why should we not start this night?"

"For a hundred reasons," she said, freeing herself suddenly from his encircling arm, and resuming something of her usual manner, the self-possessed air of a woman of the world. "First, because I would not make too great a scandal, and to fly from these gardens to-night with all those people in my train—"

"Love, there *must* be scandal whenever that odious tie be flung off," he urged; "and what can scandal matter in a society where almost every other man or woman you meet is a rake avowed or a profligate in secret? You will be worlds above the very best of them when you have broken your bond-

age; a purer, loftier spirit, mated with him you love, wearing no mask of hypocrisy, asking no favour of a world we both despise. Let not the thought of scandal stop you."

"There are other reasons. For one, I cannot run away without my clothes."

"Clothes can be bought anywhere."

"Not *my* clothes," answered Judith lightly. "Do you suppose I could live in any gown that was not made by Mrs. Tempest? She sent me home a lutestring nightgown of the sweetest sea-green only yesterday. I must take that with me whenever I go. You don't know how well I look in it."

"Incomparable, love, I am assured; like Venus Anadyomene with the green shining water rippling over her round white limbs. Well, we will wait for the lutestring nightgown, if needs must, and half a dozen pack-horse loads of gowns and furbelows, if you will; only let our flight be immediate. I can live no longer without you."

"And I scarce exist without you, dearest," she answered frankly. "I move to and fro like a sleep-walker; I answer questions at random; I betray

myself twenty times an hour, were there any one shrewd enough to observe me. I am lost, overwhelmed in the deep whirlpool of love."

"Let it be to-morrow night. I will have a coach-and-four waiting at the end of Gerard Street—"

"Too fashionable, too conspicuous a spot."

"Or in the darkest corner of Leicester Fields. We can put on another pair of leaders in the Kent Road, and then as fast as they can go to Dover. You must find some way of getting rid of Topsparkle for an hour or two."

"Not to-morrow night. That is impossible. He is to take me to Duchess Henrietta's concert. He is very punctilious about these entertainments, and has a passion for appearing in great houses with me."

"Run away from the concert."

"No, no, no, that were as awkward as from these gardens. I am thinking of my gowns. They must be got off somehow in a wagon, sent as if they were for Ringwood Abbey—old clothes to be worn out among rustics, I can say—and you must tell me

where to send the trunks; to some inn on the Dover road, I suppose, whence they can follow us to France. My diamonds I can take with me."

"Leave every stone of them behind you, dearest, if they are Topsparkle's property."

"They are not. He gave them to me as a free gift."

"Dear love, I would as soon see you decked with serpents, like Medusa. Leave your cit his dirty jewels and his dirty wealth. You and I can be happy amidst our orange-groves without either. The fireflies are brighter than your diamonds."

"What, part me from my famous jewels! Well, perhaps you are right. I should hate to wear them, for they would remind me of the giver. I have a set of garnets that belonged to my poor mother, which I verily believe are more becoming, though they are almost worthless. And I can wear *them* with honour."

"I would sell my last acre to buy diamonds for that fair neck, if you hanker after them."

"But I don't. You shall decorate me with orange-bloom. We will be completely Arcadian in

our paradise. And when we are tired of orange-groves and sea-view, you can carry me to Rome or Vienna, or to Turkey, like your wild kinswoman."

"You shall order me whithersoever you please. I will be as obedient as the genius of the lamp in those newly-discovered Arabian tales we were all reading at Ringwood last winter."

"Lady Judith, the minced chicken has been waiting for the last hour, and we are all famishing," said a sharp voice at her ladyship's elbow, and Mr. Philter tripped by her side.

"I apologise to the chicken, or rather to the company," answered Judith lightly. How lucky that Lavendale's arm was no longer round her waist, her head no longer reclining upon his Ramillies cravat! "Is it really very late?"

"On the stroke of midnight."

"How delightful! the very hour for ghosts, and this dark walk would lend itself to the habits of phantoms. Would we could meet some gentle spirit!"

"You had better come to the King's Head, where the supper-table might tempt even a ghost

to become again mortal. There can be no gentler spirit than champagne cooled with ice after the new mode. They are all dying of hunger, and sent me to hunt for you. I was to bring you to them alive or dead. I doubt if they cared which. Hunger is so horribly selfish."

"I had no idea it was so late. The nightingales and Lord Lavendale's witty discourse have beguiled me into forgetfulness."

They hurried to that gayer part of the gardens where the arbours sparkled with wax candles and jewels and beauty, and where the air was musical with laughter. All yonder had been silence and shadow: all here was rattle and animation. Supper had begun at the King's Head, on Mr. Topsparkle's insistance that they should wait no longer for his wife. Lavendale and Lady Judith carried the matter off so lightly that there seemed no room for scandal; but that keen observer, Tom Philter, noted some ugly twitchings of Mr. Topsparkle's mouth and eyebrows.

Some airy shafts Lady Judith could not escape.

"What a glorious thing is a spotless reputa-

tion!" cried Lady Polwhele, radiant and loquacious after her first half-bottle of champagne. "Had it been Asterley and I, now, who had lost ourselves for an hour in those dark walks where the nightingales sing so sweetly, people would have been ever so ill-natured about us: but Lady Judith is like Diana, her name stands for chastity. Even Lavendale's ill-repute cannot damage her. How fares it with you and your Surrey heiress, by the bye, Lavendale?"

"Off, madam, done with like the old worn-out moons that doubtless go to some rubbish-heap in the sky. She would have none of me."

"She was a foolish girl. She might do worse than marry an agreeable reprobate like you. I swear reprobates are the pleasantest beings on this earth. They flatter one's *amour propre*. One never need feel ashamed before them. Fill me another brimmer, Asterley," said the Dowager, holding out her glass, and leaning across the table with a freedom of attitude which accentuated that absence of tucker whereof the *Guardian* had discoursed in mild reproof a dozen years before. That sly humourist

and gentle moralist, Joseph Addison, had vanished from this earthly scene, and the tucker or modesty-piece, as he had called it, was not reinstated; nor had either the manners or the morals of fashionable beauty improved since the moralist's time.

Judith took the chair that had been reserved for her, and drank a glass of champagne. Her throat was parched, her eyes were burning, her hands icy cold. A few minutes ago and she had known no physical sensations. She had been an ethereal essence, made up of fervid imagination and passion's white heat, lifted to the empyrean; and now she was a woman again, weighed down with the consciousness of guilty intentions, burdened with the foreshadowing of shame. To-night she could hold her head high, look down with scornful toleration upon the flighty Dowager yonder, whose damaged reputation had been town-talk for the last ten years: but what of the day after to-morrow, when she, the unapproachable coquette, the universal tormentor, should be known to all the world as Mr. Topsparkle's runaway wife and Lord Lavendale's mistress? Would there be any mercy for her who had carried herself

so proudly, allowing her tongue to riot in ill-natured speeches and wanton scorn of the weak? Who would spare her? She scarce knew which would be worse, the pity of the women or the laughter of the men. Topsparkle had often told her the gossip of the clubs. She knew how those generous creatures of the stronger sex talk of the fallen among the weaker sex; how ruthlessly they assail that frail sister who has suffered any flaw in the armour of her honour; how much unkinder they are to the woman who was proud and virtuous yesterday, and who sits apart in her guilt and misery to-day, the Niobe of a slaughtered reputation, than to the hardened female rake who leads half the town in her train and defies scandal.

She, Judith Topsparkle, could expect no mercy. She had had too many adorers not to have a hundred enemies. Every fop whose prayers she had rejected, whose sighs she had laughed at, would feel himself avenged in her fall. Her shame would be the open delight of the town. Such a thought for a proud woman was agony. And yet, with her eyes

open, with worldly knowledge and experience to show her the depth of the abyss into which she was going down, she meant to give herself to her lover. Deliberately, resolutely, she would put her hand in his and say to him, "For good or evil, I am yours." It had come to this. Life was intolerable without him. She had never ceased to love him. From the hour of her first girlish vows that love had possessed her heart and mind, had been growing day by day in depth and power. Separation had been one long slow agony, a living death; reunion had seemed the renewal of life. And their love had been fed and fostered by daily meetings. Mr. Topsparkle's indulgence and the agreeable laxity of modern manners had been fatal. The flame of that unholy love had mounted, blazed, surrounded this impetuous woman like an atmosphere of fire. She lived only to love and be loved by Lavendale.

Of her future as a dishonoured wife, as Lavendale's mistress, she thought but vaguely. She could not see beyond the fiery present. She could not sit deliberately down and question herself about the years to come; how and where those years were to

be spent, by what name she was to be called, or what her old age—that age which should be honourable—was to be like. She thought of the ignominy of the present: she thought of the bliss of the present: but of the future, in that giddy whirl of brain and senses, she could not think.

She and her lover had been interrupted by Mr. Philter before they could complete their plans; yet she was not less resolved upon flight. In the midst of the riot of the supper-table, amidst a fire of repartee from Bolingbroke and audacious nonsense from Lady Polwhele, and the last town scandal from Captain Asterley, and a meandering stream of childish babble from his wife, these guilty lovers found time to whisper and plot their treason against the husband, who sat in a corner of the arbour, with his head against the wooden partition, and his eyes closed, enjoying a gentle slumber after the champagne and chicken.

"He is to dine in the City the day after to-morrow," whispered Judith; "that will be our opportunity. I shall be my own mistress that evening. Stay, I have asked some women to play ombre,

but I can swear I am ill and put them off early in the afternoon."

"Then I will be with you as soon as it is dark —between nine and ten will be safest—and take you on foot to the carriage, which I will have stationed at some safe corner. Your trunks had better be sent to the Bell at New Cross. I will find you a wagon and send for them at any hour you name."

"It had best be about eight in the evening, when Topsparkle will be safe in the City, drinking punch and hearing loyal speeches at the Guildhall. How sound he sleeps! I have not often seem him doze after supper. He generally seems the very incarnation of vigilance—a creature that knows not what it is to sleep."

Lady Polwhele was rising hastily amidst a confusion of tongues. The wax candles had burned low in their sockets, everything on the table had a profligate air, as after an orgy: empty bottles, broken glass, crumpled napkins, wine-stained table-cloth.

"Your lordship is simply incorri-corri-gibber," protested the Dowager, lunging at the great Tory with her fan.

"Have a care, Lady Polwhele. Incorrigible is not an easy word to pronounce at two o'clock in the morning."

"Yet you can say it, villain."

"I have always been noted for a sound head and a steady tongue."

"Faith, were your principles but as sound as your head you might be Treasurer now instead of that lubberly Norfolk squire," said her ladyship, somewhat thickly. "And then we should not all be given over to the Muggites."

"Your ladyship forgets that I am a Muggite," remarked Lavendale laughingly.

"No, I don't forget you, scaramouch. I never forget old friends"—with more fan-tappings. "And I mean to trap you an heiress yet. You shall marry bullion, Lavendale, as sure as I am one of the cleverest women in London. Look at Asterley there. 'Twas I got him his City wife, and 'tis I am training her for the Court and good company. See how sleek and bloated my Benedick begins to look, fattened by the consciousness of a full purse, as well as by the physical effects of a well-stocked larder. But

you look lean and haggard, Lavendale. I prescribe an heiress."

"Wake up, Topsparkle," cried Asterley, anxious to stop his patroness's loquacity. "The boatmen have had their night's rest, and the moon is high. Put on your roquelaures, gentlemen, and you ladies wrap your mantuas close round you. Even a July night is cold on the river."

"I have never found a July night too warm anywhere in this atrocious climate," said Topsparkle, waking with a shiver. "The earth in this latitude is only half cooked. There is no sun worth speaking of. 'Tis a raw, bleak, uncomfortable world, invented for the profit of woollen-drapers and furriers. Let me help you on with your mantua, Judith, and then let us all get home as fast as we can. 'Twas foolish to come here by water, but 'tis mad to return that way."

"Music and moonlight," murmured Lady Polwhele, with a maudlin air. "Nothing in this world so delicious as music and moonlight. I hope you brought your flute, Asterley."

"He has it in his pocket, your ladyship,"

vouched the buxom young wife, who was passing proud of her husband's trivial accomplishments.

"The flute! Lord forbid!" cried Topsparkle. "We are sure of a fit of the shivers, and it needs but Asterley's flute to give us the ague."

At last they were all out of the arbour, Lady Polwhele lurching a little as she leaned on Bolingbroke's arm, and so down to the water-side and to the gilded barge with its eight rowers, which slipped noiselessly from the shadowy shore under the summer moon.

"The moon rises late, does she not?" asked Lavendale, looking up at that silver lamp hanging in mid-heaven.

How pale he looked in that clear white light! how hollow and worn the oval of his face! how attenuated those delicate features! Judith saw only the love-light in those adoring eyes.

"The moon rises between eleven and twelve," replied Mr. Philter, who always knew, or pretended to know, everything. It is so easy to be wise in polite society. A man has but to answer with sufficient assurance and a quiet air of precision to be believed in by the ignorant majority.

CHAPTER VIII.

"YET STILL I AM IN LOVE, AND PLEASED WITH RUIN."

It was the noon of next day before Lavendale opened his curtains and rang for his letters and his chocolate—a glorious summer noontide, with a flood of sunshine pouring in through the three tall narrow windows in that front bedchamber in Bloomsbury Square. The Lavendale mansion was a fine double house with the staircase in the middle. His lordship's bedroom, dressing-room, and private writing-closet, or study, occupied one side of the first floor; on the other were two drawing-rooms, the white and the yellow, panelled and painted, opening into each other with high folding-doors after the French manner; and beyond these a small inner room, where a choice company of three or four kindred spirits might play high and drink deep, as it were in a sanctuary, remote from the household. The house had been

built by the first Lord Lavendale in his pride of place and power. Here Somers and Godolphin had been entertained; here William himself had brought his grim dark visage and high wig, his hooked nose, and his Dutch favourites, to steep themselves in the Lavendale Burgundy after a ponderous old English dinner of thirty or forty dishes. It was a house full of stately memories, a house built for a statesman and a gentleman. How pleasantly would those panelled rooms have echoed the merry voices of children, the scampering of little feet! but all prospect of domesticity was over for Lord Lavendale. To-morrow the paternal house would be deserted, perhaps for ever; left to the rats and some grimy caretaker, or sold in a year or two to the best bidder. To-day the paternal acres would be mortgaged up to the hilt, since a man who runs away with a woman of fashion must needs have ready-money. There are a few things in this life that cannot be done upon credit. Running away with your neighbour's wife is one of them.

Lavendale thought of these things in very idleness of fancy as he stirred his chocolate, while his

valet gathered up scattered garments, picked up an Alençon cravat from the floor, and reduced the disorder of the room generally. He thought of his mother, whom he remembered as the occupant of this bedchamber. The room had seemed sacred and solemn to him, like a temple, in those early days of his childhood, when he came in at bedtime to say his prayers at his mother's knee. How she had loved him! with what heart-whole devotion, with what anxiety! as he knew now, looking back upon her tenderness, understanding it with the understanding of manhood. He had not enjoyed his prayers in the abstract; but he had always liked to be with his mother. She was not one of the gadabout mothers, who see their children for five minutes in a powder-closet, look up from a patch-box to kiss little missy or master, and then airily dismiss the darling to nurse and nursery. She had always had leisure to love her boy. After those little prayers of his she would talk to him seriously of the time when he would be a man among other men in a world full of temptation. She entreated him to be good: to do right always: to be true, and

brave, and pious, obeying God, loving his fellow-creatures. She warned him against the evil of the world. Sometimes she spoke to him perhaps almost too gravely for his years; but he remembered her words now.

"She knew what a vile place this world is, and she warned me against its infamy," he said to himself. "Vain warning: grave and tender speech wasted upon an incipient reprobate. Is there some place of spirits in which she dwells, where she sees and knows my folly, and grieves, as disembodied souls may grieve, over her guilty son? I, who find it so hard to believe dogmatic religion, cannot wean myself from the fancy that there is such a world—that she whom I loved lives yet, and can feel and care for me—that the last link between mother and son was not broken when the first clod fell on the coffin."

A footman knocked at the door and handed in a salver with a letter, which the valet brought to his lordship's bedside.

"From Lady Judith Topsparkle. The messenger waits," said the man.

He had recognised the brown and orange livery,

although the footman had not mentioned his mistress's name.

"The dragon is roused at last," wrote Judith. "Topsparkle has taken alarm at our familiarity last night. I doubt he was only shamming sleep, and that he watched us while we whispered at the supper-table. No sooner were we at home than he burst into a tragic scene—Cato was never more heroic—taxed me with carrying on an intrigue with you, and using Bolingbroke as a blind. I laughed at him and defied him; on which he announced that he should carry me off to Ringwood Abbey directly after the Guildhall dinner. 'Nothing I should love better,' says I, 'for I am heartsick of the town, and you and I were made to bill and coo in solitude. All the world knows how fond we are of each other.' After this he became silently savage, white with suppressed wrath. What an evil face it is, Jack! I think he is capable of murdering me; but you may trust me to take care of myself, and to touch no potion of his mixing, between now and to-morrow night. He ordered Zélie to pack my trunks for the Abbey; the very thing I would have. They are to go off on

Thursday morning, he says. Be sure you send your wagoner on Wednesday evening. So now, dear love, from such a Bluebeard husband my flight will be a pardonable sin. I do but run away in self-defence."

"Bring me standish and portfolio," said Lavendale; and with his elbow on his pillow he wrote hastily:

"Beloved, I will not fail you. I have some business arrangements that must be made to-day, and to-morrow at dusk I will be with you. If you have any apprehension or any sense of unhappiness in the mean while, come to me here at once, and I will defend you. Once within these doors you shall be safe as in a fortress. But it will be better if we can slip away quietly. I doubt if Topsparkle will follow us to the South. From hints I have had about him I take it he is not over-fond of fighting—would fight, perhaps, if hard driven—but will not court an encounter; and for your sake I would rather not cross swords with him. So if *finesse* and patience can keep matters smooth till to-morrow night it will be well. Till then, Adored One, adieu. My heart, soul, mind, being, are in your keeping

already. This Lavendale which goes to and fro, and must needs get through the day's business, is but a breathing piece of mechanism, a self-acting puppet. The real Lavendale is sighing on your bosom."

This letter despatched, with a guinea to the gentleman in orange and brown—guinea which by some curious conjuring trick became a half-guinea at the bottom of the staircase—his lordship rose and dressed, or suffered himself to be dressed, very impatiently, and then, without any more breakfast than his cup of chocolate, walked off to his favourite Jew.

He knew most of the money-lenders in London; men who would lend at an hour's notice and on lightest security; men who were slow and cautious. It was to an enterprising usurer he went to-day.

"I want a thousand pounds immediately, Solomon," he said, flinging himself into a dusty chair in a dusty office near the Fleet, "and four thousand to follow."

Then came negotiation. Hitherto Lavendale had refused to mortgage the Surrey Manor. Other estates were heavily dipped—but the place his mother had loved, the house in which she died, had been held

sacred. Now, he would stick at nothing. He must have money at any sacrifice. Old Solomon had itched for a good mortgage on that Surrey Manor. He had a client who wanted to lend money on land near London, a rich City tradesman who hardly believed in the validity of any estate that was not within fifty miles of the metropolis. The client would think himself well off if he got five per cent for his cash; and Mr. Solomon knew that he could make Lord Lavendale pay seven per cent, and pocket the difference. His lordship was in too great a hurry for the money to consult his own lawyer, would not examine the deeds too closely. He had the air of a man who was in a fever of impatience to ruin himself. Solomon promised to have the mortgage-deed engrossed and the money ready to hand over by two o'clock. next day. Lavendale swore he must leave England at three. The money would be no use to him unless it were his before that hour.

"You shall have it," protested Solomon, "though the scrivener should have to work all night. I will go straight off to my client and bid him prepare his cash."

Lavendale went back to Bloomsbury, and gave orders about the wagon and the coach-and-four, with a third pair of horses to be ready on the other side of London Bridge, and relays all along the Dover road. His valet was as clever as Figaro, and had hitherto proved himself trustworthy.

"I am running away with an heiress, Jevons," said his lordship. "A sweet young creature of seventeen; a cit's only daughter, worth a plum in her own right."

Jevons bowed with an air of respectful sympathy, and knew that his master was lying. The orange and brown livery had appeared too often in Bloomsbury Square within the last month or so; and Jevons had seen his lordship in Lady Judith's box, from the pit of the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and knew exactly how those two stood towards each other.

"'Tis a bad business," thought Mr. Jevons, "and may end in bloodshed. I would rather see him running after masks and misses, as he did ten years ago."

Mr. Jevons was too well trained a servant to dis-

obey orders, were he even sure they must result in fatality. He would have sharpened his master's rapier for a duel as coolly as he cleaned his boots. So he went off and ordered coach, wagon, and horses, and despatched a couple of mounted grooms to ride to Dover by easy stages. They were to order relays of post-horses as they went along, and were to make sure that there should be no hitch in the journey.

"And if you find his lordship is pursued, you are to do your damnable best to prevent his pursuer getting a change of horses anywhere," said Mr. Jevons, with his authoritative air, which was more imperious than his master's.

Lavendale ordered his carriage late in the afternoon, and drove down to his Surrey Manor in the summer dusk. He wanted to see Vincenti before he left England, perhaps for ever. He wanted to see that old home which he might never look upon again. And Durnford was to be at the Manor that evening, the one friend in whose fidelity he could always confide; to whom he could confess even his

darkest secrets; whose sound sense he could rely upon when his own feather-brain failed him.

"I must make some plans for *her* future," he told himself, "for I fear I am not a long-lived man. Alas! what can I leave her? Three or four happy years in the South will exhaust my resources, and there will be nothing left but an estate mortgaged to the hilt."

This was a dark outlook, so he tried to shut his eyes to the future. And then he remembered what some knowing busybody had told him about Lord Bramber's cleverness, and the handsome settlement extorted from Mr. Topsparkle before he was allowed to carry off the lovely Judith.

"So good a settlement," said the gossip, "that her ladyship has but small inducement to remain constant to a fossil husband. She may elope whenever she likes, for she will be handsomely provided for even in her disgrace. Lord Bramber is a man of the world, and able to look ahead."

There was some consolation in the thought that Lady Judith was not to sacrifice everything in throwing away her reputation. And yet to think of her

enriched by Topsparkle's money was as bad as to see her shining in Topsparkle's diamonds.

"'Tis so evil a business that nothing can mend it," he said to himself; which was an ill frame of mind for a lover.

It was dark when he reached the Manor, and Durnford had not arrived. The coach had brought a letter from him to say that important business in the House detained him, but that he would ride down next morning.

Chagrined at this disappointment, Lavendale went straight to the laboratory, where he found Vincenti walking to and fro in an unusual state of excitement.

"Have you found the great secret?" he asked. "You have a look of triumph."

"I am nearer than I have ever been," answered the old man, with feverish eagerness; "so near that I might almost say I have reached the goal. The universal panacea is all but won. I feel a renewal of strength in every limb, a fresher life in every vein, and, if not the secret of immortality, I have at least found the key to an almost indefinitely prolonged

existence. I tell you, Lavendale, there is a medicine that will prolong life for centuries if a man is but free from organic disease."

"If!" echoed Lavendale; "that 'if' makes all the difference. If he do not fall off his horse, or if he be not turned over in a stage-coach, or drowned 'twixt Dover and Calais. If he do not fall into a crater, like Empedocles, or if he be not buried in the lava flood, like Pliny, or murdered in the street, like Tom Thynne, or killed in a duel, like Hamilton and Mohun. There is a vast variety of 'ifs' to be considered."

Vincenti was not listening to him. He walked to and fro like a man exalted by a beatific vision. Then he suddenly stopped and went over to a furnace, upon which there stood a crucible. He peered into this for some moments, and then resumed his feverish pacings up and down the spacious floor: anon suddenly tottered, and staggered over to his chair, like a man who can scarce keep himself from falling.

Lavendale went to him instantly, and put a glass of water to his lips. His brow was damp with

cold perspiration, and he had every appearance of fainting.

"Is this one of the effects of your panacea," asked Lavendale; "is this the result of that marvel-working Azoth that Paracelsus believed in?"

"It is nothing—a passing faintness. The reaction was too strong. I gave myself up too completely to the delight of my discovery—or I may have taken too powerful a dose. I tell you, my lord, the solution is infallible. It contains every element of life, every force that can sustain mind and body, strengthen every nerve, restore the quality of the blood, wasted with age. Feel my pulse, and say if it is not at once regular and strong."

"Strong?—yes, too strong for your age; too quick for health. Regular?—no. You had better go to bed, Vincenti. A basin of broth and a good night's rest will do more for you than the higher metals."

"Your lordship is mocking me. But I am somewhat exhausted by the unintermittent watching of the last three days and nights. I will lie down for an hour or two, if you will be so kind as to assist me to my room."

Lavendale supported him to an adjoining room with almost womanly tenderness, and did not leave him till he was lying comfortably in his bed. He occupied a small apartment next the chapel, a room which had once been used as a sacristy. Here the student of Nature's secret forces had a pallet, and a kind of hermit's cell, preferring such scanty accommodation close to his furnaces and alembics, to the comfortable bedchamber above-stairs which had been allotted to him at his coming.

"Yonder is a sword that has well nigh worn out its scabbard," thought Lavendale, as he went back to the library. "Did Albertus Magnus dream thus to the last, I wonder, and die on the threshold of some tremendous discovery, or fancy himself near it in his last hours? Is it all an idle dream, as Herrick says, and is there no undiscovered power that can prolong the life of man? How feverish was that old man's joy at the idea of stretching his thin thread of life! And yet one would think existence could be of little value to one who has survived every earthly passion, every human tie. But for me—for me, whose days have been so short, so

empty of all real joys; for me, whose heart beats high with fondest hopes and sweetest anticipations—'tis hard for such as I to know his days measured, his span of life dwindling fast to the vanishing point. Life might be prolonged indefinitely, says Vincenti, if there be no organic disease. That 'if' means so much. There is something tells me this heart of mine has been worked too hard upon foolish excitements and frivolous fancies, horse-races, cock-fights, the gambling-table, and the bear-pit; and that now—now when I would fain feel myself secure of length of days—the flame that burns so fiercely is but the expiring flourish of a burnt-out candle."

He struggled against those despondent feelings which had possessed him all the day; stronger even than triumphant love, which should have reigned supreme in his breast. He sent for his housekeeper, an elderly woman who had nursed his mother in her last illness, and upon whose fidelity he could rely.

"I fear my old Italian friend is very ill, Mrs. Becket," he said, "and I must depend upon you to get him nursed and duly cared for should his

malady increase. He has the air of a man in a fever."

"Your lordship may depend upon my doing all I can for the poor harmless old gentleman," replied Mrs. Becket, with a low curtsy. "But your lordship is looking amiss this evening! Is there nothing I can do for your lordship—perhaps a mild electuary?" Mrs. Becket's great forte had always been the still-room, where she had graduated, as a slip of a girl, under Lavendale's grandmother, a skilful compounder of herbs and simples, and all household medicines and confectioneries.

"Nay, my good Becket, I have no occasion for your clever prescriptions. I am perfectly well; only a little tired after my long ride."

"Your lordship's supper will be served in ten minutes, in the red parlour."

"My good soul, I have no stomach for supper. I dined—no, by the way, I did not dine, but I ate something before I left town."

"Nay, indeed, if your lordship had no dinner you ought to enjoy a split pullet and a dish of stewed cheese. I grilled the pullet with my own hands, to

make sure of despatch. And Thomas has taken up a couple of bottles of your lordship's favourite Burgundy."

"Well, I will taste your pullet with a glass of Burgundy. What is the hour?"

"Nearly eleven. Your lordship's bedchamber is being prepared."

"I have my wakeful fit on, and shall not retire early. No one need sit up for me. I shall want nothing after I have supped."

"Your lordship is always considerate."

"And now go, my good Becket, and attend to Vincenti. He is a fit subject for some of your old-fashioned family medicines."

Lavendale smiled at the thought of handing over the adept to the tender mercies of his grandmother's pupil—the student of Paracelsus and Roger Bacon to the household practitioner, learned in the traditions of village midwives and itinerant herbalists, and the elaborate prescriptions of ancient ladies handed down from mother to daughter from the dark night of the Middle Ages, not altogether free from the savour of witchcraft. He was in a mood to wonder whether

Paracelsus and the Ghebir Arabs were any cleverer than those ancient ladies who spent their mornings, aproned and bibbed, in the busy seclusion of the still-room.

He repaired to the red parlour, but although he had eaten scarcely anything since the supper at Vauxhall he had no appetite for Mrs. Becket's savoury pullet or smoking dish of cheese. His lips were parched, and food was distasteful to him; but he finished a bottle of Burgundy before he went back to the library, where he had his papers to look over and arrange on the eve of an exile that might be long.

The spacious seldom-inhabited room had a desolate aspect, dimly lighted by two pairs of wax candles in massive silver candlesticks. One pair stood on a bureau at the end of the room, the other on his lordship's scrutoire. The long windows were open to the summer night, the moon was rising, and her faint pale light shone in upon the empty floor.

Lavendale unlocked drawers, and took out papers from secret recesses, and occupied himself closely

for the next hour in a scrutiny of his affairs, seriously trying, for the first time since his majority, to discover how much of his inheritance he had wasted, and what amount of assured income yet remained to him.

His list of rents looked well, but against his rental he had to put the interest of mortgages; and when these were all told the balance in his favour was but slender.

"Well, I shall be as nearly a pauper as a man of rank can well be when these five thousand pounds are gone," he said to himself, "and when I am dead Judith will have to live upon her settlement. 'Tis an ugly look-out. She has extravagant tastes, too, and has been accustomed since her marriage to fling money about at random; to gratify every whim, riot in every luxury. Will she not curse me years hence when she finds herself reduced to the narrower limit of her pin-money, which, however handsome, will hardly allow her to melt pearls, like Cleopatra, or to venture in every lottery, bid for every Chinese monster and Indian screen, and entertain a crowd of flatterers at every meal, to say nothing of ombre

and quadrille?" And then he told himself that Judith had only been extravagant because she was unhappy. That all her follies had been but the endeavour to stop the pain of an aching heart, with the anodyne of frivolous pleasures. She had told him once that she would be true to him in poverty and every ill; told him with her arms round his neck, that night they swore fidelity to each other in the little Chinese room at Lady Skirmisham's, when both were free and such vows were innocent. Had the world so changed her that she would be less disinterested now, when in the maturity of her womanhood she was to give herself to him freely, deeming the world well lost for love? "What is the world that any woman should regret the loss of it?" he thought: "a raree-show, a kind of modish Bartholomew Fair, where wits and beauties, politicians and heroes, are all of them as false, and many of them as thickly painted, as any mummer at Smithfield. No, I will not be such a fool as to feel remorse at stealing my beloved from such a world as ours."

He put away his papers and locked his scrutoire

with a sigh, finding himself even poorer than he had thought. And then he began to pace the room in a reverie. It was nearly midnight, but he had no inclination for sleep. His brain was a vortex of busy thoughts. His imagination flew from one subject to another with restless variety—now anticipating evil, now dreaming of an idyllic bliss, unbroken by a cloud.

Then that shadow of fear, that vague apprehension of unknown evil which had been upon him all day, seemed suddenly to deepen, until it wrapped him round like a pall. The absolute silence of the house oppressed his spirits. He had heard doors locked and bolted, and footsteps retiring an hour ago. The household was asleep, remote from that spacious library, which was in a wing apart, ending in the chapel. He could hardly have been more lonely in the depths of a forest; and to-night, for the first time within his memory of himself, solitude seemed an evil.

He tried to picture to-morrow night and its feverish joys. At this hour they would be travelling, as swiftly as six horses could carry them, on

the road to Dover; apprehensive of pursuit, fluttered, anxious, yet infinitely happy. Yonder waning moon would be shining upon them seated side by side, their lives linked for ever—the last irrevocable step taken—the world defied.

"O, happy night, would it were come! would I could lift my soul out of this gloom by picturing to-morrow's joy!"

He paced slowly up and down the polished floor, on which his footsteps echoed with a dismal sound. The cold silvery moonbeams trembled upon the sombre rows of folios and quartos, and the heavy carving of the oak bookcases. One end of the room was in broad moonlight, the other in shadow. The candles made only feeble patches of yellow light, scarcely noticeable against that clearer, brighter light from the moon. Never had the room looked so desolate or so unhomelike to Lavendale; and yet it was the one room of all others most familiar to him and dearest from association. It was here his mother's widowhood had been chiefly spent. Her studious habits had made this library her chosen retreat. There was not a book upon yonder shelves

which she had not handled; and there were few of which she had not read much or little. Her favourite authors were assembled in one particular block, which she had classified and arranged with her own hands. Lavendale had brought his lessons to her many a time in this room, to ask her aid in his preparation for his tutor. And it had been her pride and delight to help her boy in his studies. It brought mother and son nearer together. And then came tender counsel, gentle admonition, warning against the indulgence of a wilful temper, hasty anger, thoughtlessness about other people's feelings —all those failings to which high-spirited youth is prone.

Yes, he recalled those tender monitions with an aching heart. Not once had the memory of those words held him back from sin; and yet he had always remembered, only too late. If in the dim after-world she were conscious of his follies, of his guilt, how would she look upon this last sin?

"Has she memory or consciousness in that unknown world?" he asked himself; "or was that sweet nature but a part of the universal soul which

has been reabsorbed into the infinite from which it came? O God, could I but know! Has she whom I loved any individual existence beyond the veil?"

He stood with clasped hands and bent head, recalling those unforgotten tones, the mother's smile, even the caressing touch of taper fingers lightly resting on his brow and hair. He stood thus brooding till he was startled by a faint fluttering sound in the air near him, and looking suddenly upward he saw a white dove which had flown in at one of the open windows.

There was nothing particularly strange in such an apparition in the neighbourhood of woods full of wild pigeons; and yet the sight thrilled him. He stood watching the bird as it slowly fluttered across the room a little way above his head, now in moonlight, now in shadow—he remembered afterwards that the candles seemed at this time to give no light—and fluttered on till it was lost in the shadows at the further end of the room.

Then slowly—the bird having vanished—there grew out of the shadows a vague luminous form, first only a spot of dim tremulous radiance, and then

gradually an appearance as of a woman's shape, faintly outlined—a white-robed form, dimly defined against darkest shadow. It quivered there for moments which seemed to that startled gazer a long lapse of time, and faint as the light was, it dazzled him. He could hardly endure the strange radiance, yet could not withdraw his gaze.

Faintly, as if from far distance, unlike any sound his ears had ever heard, there came these words: "Repent, Lavendale, repent! Prepare for death!"

It was his mother's voice, or a faint echo of what her voice had been in life. Those unearthly tones were at once strange and familiar—familiar enough to move him to tears, yet so strange as to overpower him with terror.

Cold sweat-drops broke out upon his forehead, and he fell swooning to the ground.

CHAPTER IX.

"AND, LO! MY WORLD IS BANKRUPT OF DELIGHT."

LORD LAVENDALE lay late on the morning after his arrival at the Manor. It had been late when he crept up to his room, tremulous from the effects of his fainting-fit, which he had shaken off as best he might, without help of any kind. A sleepless night was followed by a drowsy morning.

"Tell Mr. Durnford to come to me directly he arrives," he said to the servant who waited upon him at the Manor, "and let me be awakened if I am asleep when he comes."

And then he turned his head to the wall and dozed, or thought, with his eyes shut.

"My dearest Lavendale, you are not often such a sluggard," exclaimed Herrick, coming into the room between twelve and one. "I hope you are not ill."

"No, I am not ill," answered his lordship, sitting

up in bed, and facing his friend in the bright sunshine.

"You say you are not ill, but you are as white as a ghost. What have you been doing with yourself, Jack?"

"Raking, Herrick, raking! A long night at Vauxhall with Lady Polwhele and her crew, a debauch of champagne and minced chicken; the Dowager cooked the mess herself, I believe, over a spirit-lamp, though I was not there to see. Dark walks, nightingales and folly, and home by water under the moonlight. A pretty sight enough, those twinkling gardens, and the cold, bright moonlit river beyond."

"There must have been something more than nightingales and champagne, Jack, or you would not have that ghastly look. There is something very much amiss."

"There is something very much amiss, and I want you to set it right for me. What was friendship invented for except to get a fellow out of scrapes?"

"I have ever been your *âme damnée*, Lavendale,"

answered Herrick, betwixt jest and earnest. "It is the fashion to say that Lord Lavendale would have been a virtuous youth had not that scamp Durnford led him astray."

"And yet I swear you were always the better of the two, and have oftener played Mentor than Mephistopheles. But now you have become a senator the town begins to respect you. You are no longer Lavendale's *alter ego*—the careless rake and spendthrift. You are a young man with a career, a great future before you. And now, Herrick, I want you to save me from my own selfish passion, my own reckless folly, and to save one who is well-nigh as reckless, and whom I love better than myself."

"Lady Judith Topsparkle."

"What, you know, then?"

"I know nothing more than all the town knows —that at the rate you and Lady Judith are travelling you must both go to perdition sooner or later, unless you make a sudden pull-up. When one sees children picking flowers upon the edge of an abyss, one may easily guess the result."

"And we are not children, and we knew the

abyss was there. We have been wilfully blind, audacious, desperate. Herrick, we are pledged to be each other's ruin here and hereafter. Can a man of honour, do you think, recall such a pledge —break his word to the lady he has sworn to destroy?"

"Perhaps from a modish point of view he would be a poltroon and a perjurer; but as a gentleman and a Christian he would do well to be forsworn."

"I am to carry off Lady Judith this night, Herrick; coach and horses are ordered, relays bespoke all along the road, the lady's trunks are packed. I have raised five thousand, by way of a first instalment, upon this place. Everything is ready. Shall I not seem a base hound if I draw back?"

"I know not what you will seem; but if you can save the lady's honour—"

"She is spotless, Herrick. We have been near the abyss, not over it."

"Save her, then, at any cost."

"What, at the cost of rage and mortification to her? For I doubt she has set her heart upon destroying herself for my sake—would rather endure

poverty and degradation with me than queen it as the wife of Topsparkle. But this must not be, Herrick. There is a reason, an unanswerable reason, why I should not spoil her life for a few short months of bliss."

"There are a hundred reasons. Why speak so mysteriously of one?"

"Because it is the strongest, and in some wise mysterious. I am doomed, Herrick. I have been warned that I had best prepare myself for the grave. I have but a short time to live."

"What a foolish fancy! And from whom comes the mysterious warning? From your familiar, Vincenti?"

"Not from him. He promises me length of days, if I will but school myself to the adept's scanty regimen. My warning came from a Higher Source, and from an authority I cannot question. Do not let us discuss the matter, Herrick. It allows of no argument, and is too sacred for question. It is enough for you to know that I have been warned. My days have shrunk to the briefest space. I am not a man to spoil any woman's life."

"You have had some mysterious dream? You were ever a dreamer."

"Yes, I have had a dream."

"'Twas your guardian angel sent the vision if it can deter you from contemplated evil. By heaven, Jack, I believe every man has his Pacolet, his guardian and friend, for ever trying to save him from his own baser inclinations."

"Yet that friendly guardian spirit of whom poor Dick Steele wrote so pleasantly was, after all, but a feeble protector, and was impotent against human folly and self-will. I believe, Herrick, that in most men there is an innate respect for virtue, accompanied by a natural leaning towards vice. Mind and conscience pull one way—heart and senses tug the other; and in most cases the flesh and the Devil get the victory. And now will you do me this favour—will you save Judith from me, and me from myself?"

"I will do anything in this world to so holy an end."

"Then you will go to Judith this evening at dusk, when Mr. Topsparkle is to be in the City, and

you will give her a letter from me. You will sustain that letter by whatever moral lecture you may feel moved to deliver; and you will so act that she will understand that, though my passion is unchanged, my resolution is irrevocable. Say nothing of an early doom; for did she know my motive, her generosity would be eager for self-sacrifice—she would be in haste to fling herself away upon a dying man. Let me even appear to her a coward, a prig, a pious renegade from love and fidelity—anything, so that you save her from the ruin we had planned."

"Trust me, my dear Lavendale. I will perform this mission with all my heart. Could I not go at once—as soon as a horse can be saddled—and see the lady before the evening?"

"Too perilous. She is rash and impetuous. She might betray herself by some burst of passion. It were best that you should not see her till Topsparkle be off the premises, and her afternoon visitors despatched. 'Twere safest, I think, for you to wait till near sunset."

"That will suit me better, for then I may hope to get a glimpse of my mistress, in spite of

her guardian and gaoler, good little Mademoiselle Latour."

"How will you manage to let her know of your vicinity, since you dare not approach the house, for fear of her churlish father?"

"O, I have a Mercury in the shape of a gardener's boy, who will contrive to let her know I am near the old trysting-place, if she be out of doors; and she spends most of her life in the garden this summer weather."

"Happy lovers, whose very ruses are innocent, and have a flavour of Arcady! Ah, Herrick, how I envy you!"

"Dear friend, it is not too late for you to be as happy as I am. There are plenty of virtuous women in this world, some as lovely as Irene, from among whom the irresistible Lavendale might choose a new mistress."

"Might? It is too late, Herrick. The passing bell of love and hope has sounded. I never loved but one woman, and her I outraged by a profligate's motiveless folly. There—go to your divinity, and be back in time for your journey to London. You

can take any horse you like; your own nag can stay till you return to-morrow. I shall be all impatience to hear how Judith received you."

An hour later and Herrick and Irene were standing on each side of the oak paling, as they had stood at their first meeting, under summer boughs, with the dogs for their sole companions. It was a little more than a year since that accidental meeting, and although they were wholly pledged to each other, they seemed no nearer the possibility of union than they had been a year ago.

"Charlie brought me your little note, and I stole away from poor Mademoiselle, who has a headache, and was obliged to lie down after my music-lesson. She suffers so much from the heat."

"And you—"

"O, I love it. I ought to have been an Indian. I love to sit in the sun and read Shakespeare."

"'Twas I taught you to love Shakespeare, was it not?" he asked fondly.

"'Twas you first talked to me of him. And then I saw Mr. Booth act. That was glorious. The characters seemed to have a new life after that: they

live and move before me when I read the plays, as they never did before. How well you are looking, Herrick! Are you working as hard as ever?"

"Harder, dearest. I write more than ever, and I have the House for my only recreation. Don't look frightened, Rena; hard work suits me. I thrive upon it. I have two secrets to tell you, love."

"Secrets—not dreadful ones?" she asked, with clasped hands.

"Far from dreadful. First, I am beginning to save money. Yes, Rena, I have a hundred pounds in the bank. Secondly, I have written a play, and Colley Cibber and his committee at Drury Lane have promised to produce it for me in the autumn."

"O Herrick, how delightful! Let me see your play. You have brought it, haven't you?"

"No, dearest; the manager has the manuscript."

"What is it about?"

"Love and lovers."

"Is it a tragedy?"

"No, sweetest, I am too happy in the assurance of your love to be tragic, even upon paper. It is a comedy, as light as Wycherley, but without his

coarseness. I have written, not for vizard masks and modish ladies, but for virtuous wives and daughters. There is not a blush from the rise of the curtain to the epilogue; but for all that, Mr. Cibber believes the play will take."

"I feel sure it is better than anybody else's play."

"That were to say too much; but I doubt if it is quite the worst thing that was ever put on the stage."

"What is it called?"

"*The Old Story.*"

They were strolling side by side, with only that post and rail fence between them, which scarcely seemed a boundary. The dogs gambolled round them, snapping at summer flies, fighting with each other every now and then, in a friendly way, with playful growls and yelps of delight, as if the gladness of life in the abstract must needs be expressed somehow.

"And now tell me, dearest, have your tyrants abated their tyranny? Are you as closely watched as ever?"

"Not quite. Mrs. Layburne is ill, and she was the only gaoler I dreaded. Of course it is hard not to be able to see you, except by stealth. But dear Mademoiselle and my good old nurse Bridget are always kind, even though they must obey my father's orders. And then I try to be happy, and to feel confident of your love, and I hope that Providence will break down all barriers by and by. I can be patient, hoping this."

"And you do not sigh for town and town pleasures?"

"No, Herrick. The town was delightful when you were there, and I could see you almost every day. Without you the gayest place would be dreary. If I am to be sad I would rather suffer my sadness among these dear old woods which are a part of my life. I suppose it is in one's nature to love the place in which one was born."

"Yes, dearest, it would seem so," replied Herrick, suddenly thoughtful.

And then after a pause he asked, "What ails Mrs. Layburne?"

"I fear it is a consumption. She has a terrible

cough, and she has wasted away sadly since last winter. I could never like her; but there is something about her that makes me feel more sorry for her than I ever felt for any one else in my life. She seems the very spirit of despondency. Her presence fills the house with gloom; and yet she rarely leaves her own little parlour, where she sits alone, without books or needlework, or any occupation to distract her mind. She sits and broods, Bridget says. No one can remember having ever seen her smile since she first came here. It is an awful life."

"Does your father's doctor visit her?"

"Yes, the old doctor sees her now and then—very much against her will, I believe, but my father has ordered him to attend her. He told Mademoiselle that the case was hopeless. She has been slowly wasting away for years; and a severe cold she caught last winter has fastened upon her lungs, and must end in death."

"Your father is sorry, no doubt, to lose so faithful a servant."

"My father never speaks of her. Once when I talked to him about her illness he had such an angry

look that I have never spoken of her in his hearing since then; but I would do anything I could for her comfort, poor soul. Mademoiselle and Bridget are very attentive to her, or at least as attentive as she will suffer them to be. She is a strange person."

They talked of a pleasanter theme after this, talked as lovers talk—of each other—an inexhaustible subject; and after less than an hour of this sweet converse it was time for them to part—Rena to hurry back to her governess, Herrick to return to the Manor in time for his long ride to London.

CHAPTER X.

"FORGET, RENOUNCE ME, HATE WHATE'ER WAS MINE."

MR. TOPSPARKLE had gone to the City dinner, and Lady Judith had closed her doors against the butterfly acquaintance whose visiting hours could scarce be kept within reasonable limits, so eminently social was that age in which ladies of quality met every evening to ruin each other at cards or dice.

The sun was setting, and Judith was alone in her favourite parlour, a fine panelled room on the first floor, with three tall narrow windows facing westward; a room fit for a palace, with ceiling and doors painted by Gillot, and with a chimney-piece by Grinling Gibbons, crowded with rarest Indian cups and platters, and innumerable monsters and gods in jade and ivory, ebony, bronze, and porcelain. The sofa and chairs were of Gobelin tapestry, brought over by Mr. Topsparkle, and were the exact copy of

a set that had been made for Madame de Montespan. Everywhere appeared evidences of wealth and taste. The Princess of Wales had no such apartment. The Duchess of Kendal would have sold the curios and rich furniture, had they been hers to turn into cash. Lady Judith scorned her surroundings as if they had been dirt. She had always talked contemptuously of her husband's rage for the arts, but the town took that air of hers for suppressed pride. But of late she had felt something worse than scorn for these costly treasures; she had felt absolute hatred for every object associated with the man she loathed.

"Why could I not have married Lavendale, to live in a hut or a gipsy's van?" she thought; and it seemed to her as if all the luxuries in which she had rioted, the cup of pleasure which she had drained to the dregs, had been odious to her from the very beginning. It was a phase of ingratitude, perhaps, to which runaway wives are subject.

"Thank God, I shall be far away from this rubbish to-morrow," she said to herself, pacing up and down the room, impatient for the hour which should bring her freedom. "How my soul pants

for solitude and simplicity—that sweet solitude of two who in heart and mind are as one! O, the delight of the long, careless journey to the sunny South! The rapture of strange inns, where no one will know me as Lady Judith Topsparkle; the fortune of the road, good or ill; bad dinners, sour wines, garrulous landlords, changing landscapes, sea, mountain, wood, valley—and my beloved always by my side—in sunlight and moonlight, in calm and in storm!"

She looked at the Sèvres timepiece on the mantelshelf. How slowly the hands moved! She almost thought they must have stopped, and went across to listen for the beat of the pendulum. Yes, the clock was going regularly enough: it was she whose life went so fast. No swing of the pendulum could keep pace with that passionate heart of hers.

The sun was down; the western sky had reddened to blood colour. Hark! there was a step on the stairs. His, of course. She stood with throbbing heart, ready to sink into his arms.

No, it was not his step. It was firm, and light, and quick—a young man's step, but not *his*. There

was no melody she had known all her life more familiar to her ear than Lavendale's footstep. She could not be mistaken in that.

A footman opened the door and announced Mr. Durnford.

Lady Judith turned with an air of haughty interrogation. Her frown and the angry flash from her dark eyes asked plainly by what right he approached her at such an hour. And then she remembered the closeness of the friendship between Durnford and Lavendale, and her heart sank with a sudden fear.

"Is his lordship ill?" she asked eagerly, as if the world knew but one lordship.

"No, madam; but I come from him. I am the bearer of a letter."

He took a sealed letter from his breast-pocket and handed it to her.

She snatched it from him, and turned to the window, where there was just light enough to read it, her bosom heaving, her cheeks whitening to the hue of her powdered hair.

The letter was all tenderness: a letter of renunciation and farewell, eloquent with saddest feeling:

a letter which to a less imperious nature might have been salvation. But Judith wanted to go to perdition her own way; and on a woman bent upon losing her soul for her lover, all unselfish reasoning must needs be wasted.

"Have *I* counted the cost?" she asked herself, "and if not I, why should he be so punctilious? Lavendale! Lavendale, whose very name is a synonym for dissipation and debauchery—for *him* to turn mentor and lecture me! O, it is too much!" and then, turning fiercely upon Durnford, she exclaimed,

"This is your work, sir."

"Indeed, no, madam."

"Indeed, yes, sir. You know all about this letter. You stood by his elbow while he wrote—you dictated it. 'Tis *your* new-fledged sobriety that has come between my love and me. What, after his letter of yesterday, burning with passion, he writes to-day like a schoolmaster, and preaches of repentance and the fear of a lifelong remorse. What is my remorse to him, if it ever came, when he has my love—my soul's devoted illimitable love? Why, I would hang upon the wheel beside him, hang there

and suffer. I would endure the torments that slew Ravaillac, the tortures Brinvilliers suffered, for his sake; and shall I fear the scorn of a little world in which there are scarce half a dozen virtuous women? Mr. Durnford, to speak freely, since you doubtless know all that has passed between his lordship and me—I can tell you that I *have* counted the cost, and esteem it a *bagatelle*. So I pray you take back my lord's letter, which your virtue has inspired, and bid him come to me at once. I want to see him, and not wise sentences dictated by another."

"I can assure your ladyship I had no part in that letter. 'Twas my friend's own impulse moved him to write. It is by his wish I am here to bring you his farewell."

"Pshaw! I tell you, sir, I see through it all. Your protestations are useless. Go and send his lordship to me this instant."

"That were not easy, madam. Lord Lavendale is at his place in Surrey, thirty miles from London."

"He is thirty miles off, when I have been expecting him here every moment, when I have made

all my plans—looked my last at this hateful house —was ready to fling on my cloak and go with him. O, the trickster, the poltroon, to play fast and loose with the woman who loves him! Tell your master, sir, that he is no gentleman, or he would never have penned that letter."

"I have no master, madam; and I protest, my friend Lavendale was never a truer gentleman than when he renounced a lady whom he adores."

"I do not believe in his adoration. He has basely lied to me. It was a caprice—a transient fancy—an amusement—a wager, perhaps. Yes, a wager, like his affair with Chichinette. He has wagered a thousand or so that he would bring me to the brink of an elopement, and now he and his friends are laughing at me."

"You know his heart too well to suspect him of such baseness, madam. Believe me that it is in your interest alone that letter was written. Lord Lavendale's absence to-night is the highest proof he can give you of his love—a self-sacrificing love."

"He is a coward—a coward to strike such a blow! He knows how I love him." She burst into

tears, and fell sobbing upon her sofa, her face hidden, her hands clasped above her head, all her body shaken by the vehemence of her grief.

O, bright dream that she had dreamt—never to be realised! That glorious vision of life in sunny lands, a life that should have been an endless love-song—gay, flowing, melodious as a ballad by Suckling or Prior. The journey, whose every stage fancy had pictured; the fetterless existence, unoppressed by the restraints of ceremony, or the formalities of a Court—life lived for its own sake, not to please the public eye. And he baulked her every hope; he flung her back upon the husband she loathed—the splendour of which she was sick unto death. He told her that for her sake it was best they should part; that reputation is the jewel of a woman's life; that he had reflected in solitude and silence upon the sacrifice she had been about to make for him; and that reflection had convinced him he would be a scoundrel to accept such a sacrifice. Loving her passionately, devoted to her with all his heart, honour constrained him to bid her adieu for ever.

"Coward, coward, coward!" she hissed between

her clenched teeth, when there came a lull in her storm of grief.

Then she rose in her wrath, tall as Juno, straight as a dart, and faced Herrick with a sardonic smile.

"Well, sir, we have played out our comedy (his lordship and I), and the play is somewhat shorter than I fancied it would be; the curtain is down, and the candles are out; the spectators can all go home again. If 'twas not a wager on his lordship's side, 'twas almost as pretty a device any way. I acknowledge that you and he are winners: you have had the best of me."

She made him a low curtsy, one of those graceful sweeping curtsies of the patch and powder period which are an extinct art. She swept the ground with her brocade train and rose again, swan-like, or like a new Venus rising from billows of silk and lace. She had dashed the tears from her cheeks, and when the footman came in presently to light the candles in the sconces, there was no sign of grief upon her face, save its unnatural pallor, and the hectic spot on each cheek which intensified that livid whiteness.

"Is it an impertinence to wish you good-night, Mr. Durnford?" she asked, when the servant had retired.

"Nay, Lady Judith, I would not trespass on your courtesy for another moment." He bowed, and was departing, when she stopped him.

"There was a wagon to carry my trunks to New Cross," she said. "It will look foolish if my luggage is diverted that way while I—"

"The wagon has been stopped, madam. I saw to that an hour ago."

"Then there is no more to be said, and his lordship need apprehend no ill-consequences from his—jest."

"Lady Judith, I am convinced you know better than—"

"I know nothing, sir, except that I have been fooled," she answered, her eyes flashing angry fire at him from under the darkly-pencilled brows. "Why are you such ages in taking your leave? Good-night, sir, good-night."

She pulled a bell-rope with an impetuous hand, which sent a loud ringing through the silent house.

Two lacqueys flew to answer her summons, thinking there was something amiss.

"The door!" she said. "Show Mr. Durnford to his chair."

The moment he was gone she flung herself upon her sofa, tore down the elaborate edifice of powdered locks, plucked open her bodice, and abandoned herself to a fit of hysteria. She lay, face downwards, on the sofa in her disorder and dejection, like Cleopatra after Actium, when Cæsar's swift galleys had come down upon her, and all the intoxication of false hope was over.

She lay thus for about a quarter of an hour—a long agony—and then rose suddenly and hurried to her dressing-room, which was the adjoining apartment.

Here she changed her brocade for an Indian silk nightgown, bathed her swollen eyelids with scented water, and gathered up her streaming locks before she rang for her maid.

"I have changed my mind, Zélie," she said; "I shall go to Lady Townley's drum. My headache is cured."

Zélie expressed herself enchanted, despatched messengers right and left for her ladyship's hair-dresser and her ladyship's chairmen, lighted the candles in her ladyship's powdering-closet, brought forth jewel-cases, satin trains, brocaded sacques, embroidered petticoats, for choice.

"I will wear white," said Judith, without so much as a side-glance at that heap of finery; "nothing but white. I have a foolish fancy, Zélie. I should like to look a bride."

"Her ladyship has always a bridal air, a fresh young beauty which shines out amidst all other faces," protested the Frenchwoman.

"Fresh! Young!" cried Judith. "Don't mock me, girl! I feel like the Witch of Endor. But for sport I'll dress as a bride."

And so, dazzling in white satin and white velvet, with a string of priceless pearls twisted amidst her powdered hair, and a plume of snowy ostrich feathers drooping upon her ivory shoulders, Lady Judith Topsparkle appeared at Lady Townley's drum, which was an assemblage of all the best people in town. Chesterfield was there, big with his mission to the Hague,

and his successes among burgomasters' fat wives. Hervey and his beautiful young wife were among the gayest spirits; and Pulteney, punning in Greek, flushed with his fourth bottle; and Bolingbroke, whose easy equability no potations could ever disturb.

The bucks and beaux all gathered round that radiant creature, whose insolence charmed them more than the amiability of other women, and who could keep them all at a distance, yet draw them as the magnet draws iron; could have them fluttering about her and following her from room to room, yet never say too kind a word or return too ardent a glance. To one only had she been kind; for one only had those brilliant eyes melted to softness.

To-night she was at her gayest. Every one noticed her vivacity; the women with malevolent shrewdness.

"Lady Judith must have been losing at cards," said one. "There is an affectation in that arrogant mirth of hers which hides some secret agony."

"She may have been backing race-horses at Newmarket," replied another. "I have heard her betting with Chesterfield."

"Or she may have quarrelled with Lavendale," hazarded a cantankerous mother of three plain daughters.

"What, is that affair begun again?"

"It began the day he came back to England, I believe. They took up the story at the very page where they left off. The only difference was Mr. Topsparkle, and he seems the essence of good-nature."

Durnford looked in late at the party, after a stormy sitting in the House, where Walpole was fighting for his Excise Bill, and he was astounded at beholding Lady Judith the centre of an adoring circle. He had left a Niobe, he found a Juno, flaming in all the glory of her peacock car. Mr. Topsparkle came on from Soho Square when he heard his wife had changed her mind and had gone to Lady Townley's. She could not be too frivolous or too expensive for his humour, though he drew the line at gambling debts. It was when she was grave that he suspected her. And he had suspected her the other night at Vauxhall. That disappearance in the dark walks with Lavendale had roused

his ire, for at heart he had always been jealous of that old lover; and then under a feigned somnolence he had watched those two whispering together at the supper-table in the King's Head arbour, and he had made up his mind that there was mischief. He had hinted his suspicions to his wife that night after their return to Soho, and injured innocence had taken the most vehement form in that offended lady. Recriminations of the bitterest kind had followed: he had reproached her with her extravagance, her passion for dice, cards, lotteries, and race-horses; he had taunted her with the poverty of her girlhood, her concealed eagerness to trap a rich husband.

"Was I eager for you?" she asked insultingly. "Did you not kneel at my feet, amidst the other dirt, before I would have you?"

"O, you played your part cleverly," he answered; "you knew that a man of my stamp was to be won by seeming independence. You were too old a huckster not to know your market."

"Sell me again," she cried, "if you think you bought me too dear! Sell me to the highest bidder.

There is not a man in town to whom I would not sooner belong than to you."

"To your old lover Lavendale, for instance."

"Ay, to Lavendale. I would rather be his slave than your queen."

"But I have not quite done with you yet. You had better be patient, and wait till you are my widow." The argument grew more and more acrimonious, and finally Mr. Topsparkle announced his intention of carrying off his wife to Ringwood.

"You can play the queen there within narrower bounds," he said.

"You mean that it will be easier to watch me?"

"That is just what I mean. You are too wild a bird to fly without a string."

After this Mr. Topsparkle had a little conversation with his ancient, M. Fétis, who, in London, oscillated between Soho Square and his own particular establishment in Poland Street, where he had a plump French wife, who carried on the business in his absence: a native of Périgord, with a fine eye and nose for truffles, and who was said to cook

certain dishes better than any *chef* at the Court end of the town. M. Fétis undertook to keep his eye on her ladyship. She was not the first sultana he had guarded for his sultan. 'Twas he who met Mr. Topsparkle as he alighted from his chair after the Guildhall dinner, with the intelligence that Lady Judith had recovered her spirits and had gone to Lady Townley's assembly.

"Has she had any visitors since I went out?" asked Topsparkle.

"Only Mr. Durnford. He came at dusk and stayed about half an hour."

"*About* half an hour!" echoed his master testily. "You have a watch, sir, and might have timed the gentleman accurately."

Topsparkle had his wig recombed and his complexion revived before he went on to Golden Square, and appeared there as white as Lord Hervey, and radiant with smiles.

"How our City Crœsus grins!" exclaimed Pulteney to a friend, "and what a death's-head grin it is!

'Quin et Ixion Tityosque vultu
Risit invito—'

One could imagine a shade in Tartarus with just such a ghastly smile. And how lovely his young wife looks to-night, lovely enough to keep that poor old atomy in perpetual torment!"

CHAPTER XI.

"AND WE SHALL FADE, AND LEAVE OUR TASK UNDONE."

LAVENDALE stayed at his Surrey manor for more than a month, seeing no one but his old Italian friend and the servants who waited upon him, and never once going beyond the boundary of his own domain. For some days after his interview with Herrick Durnford he existed in a kind of apathy, interested in nothing, but living for the most part in his own chamber, brooding dreamily upon that luminous form which had shone upon him out of the midnight shadows, and that spirit voice which had seemed to him so familiar and yet so strange. In every syllable he had recognised his mother's tones, and in that faint phantasmal semblance of life he had beheld the outline of his mother's graceful figure and classic head. Not for an instant did he doubt that his mother's shade had been with him in the

room where so much of their united lives had been spent, or that the warning of his early doom had been the emanation of his mother's mind.

He, the infidel, the student of Toland and Tindale, the friend and associate of Voltaire, had been at once subjugated by his first experience of a world beyond the world of sense. He did not accept that shadowy visitant as an evidence of revealed religion; but it was to him at least something more than a projection of his own imagination. It was to him an assurance of a love beyond the grave, of a spiritual link between those who have loved each other on earth, a sympathy which corruption cannot destroy or worms devour. Out of darkness and dust his mother's voice had called to him, "Prepare for death." She who had taught him the Gospel at her knees now called upon him, who had lived as an infidel, to die as a Christian.

Not for an instant did he doubt that warning. It was not the first; but all previous warnings had been purely physical. That sudden agony which had seized him on two or three occasions at long intervals within the last three or four years had

warned him of organic disease. His heart had been tortured by that acute anguish which tells of the hardening of the valves; and though the fit had passed quickly, cured by a medicine which Vincenti had prepared for him, it had left him weakened and depressed. He had never cared to question Vincenti as to the cause of that pain, or to consult any better qualified adviser; but he knew that the symptom must point to some organic evil, something of which the end might be death.

And now, having deliberately renounced that which he deemed his final chance of happiness, he sat alone in that spacious library where he had seen the vision, and brooded over the past, the fatal irrevocable past, with all its storm and fury and its small sum of happiness, and wondered, with a half-apathetic wonder, what his life would have been like if he had been a good Christian.

"It is hard to argue by analogy, since the type is so rare in the world I have lived in," he mused. "The good Christian is a modest creature, who generally hides his light under a bushel, though the Gospel warns him against such self-extinguish-

ment. I have known sceptics of every colour, from the Queen, who patronises churchmen and philanders with philosophers, to Bolingbroke, who fears neither man nor God; but of Christians how few! There was Addison, whose boasted Christianity was at best a matter of temperament—nature had given him an easy disposition and a love of sound Oporto. There was Steele, full of pious aspirations and pot-house inclinations, always sinning and for ever repenting. There is our mock Diogenes, Jonathan Swift! Shall I count that supple courtier and arrogant place-hunter, that bold renegade, a disciple of Him whose gospel was meekness and whose life was spent in doing good? Shall I call bluff Walpole a Christian? No; in all true Christianity there must be a touch of asceticism, and there is nothing of the ascetic in our foxhunting Treasurer. Even Atterbury is not altogether free from the taint of worldliness, and would rather play king-maker amidst the turmoil of plot and counterplot than educate himself for heaven in the obscurity of exile. The ideal Christian is an extinct species; and methinks the most pious man I know is old Vincenti yonder, with

his solemn reverence for that terrible name which the lips of the adept dare not utter. Only among the votaries of the sacred art is that profound conception of God—a God whose very name, written within the symbol of the Trinity, can move mountains, transmute metals, change and overthrow the four elements. Yes, that is the highest religion I have ever met with since the childlike faith of my mother. Would I could believe, as that old man believes, in the mystery of a master mind ruling and pervading the universe! But to believe only in clay—mere corruptible flesh, which the worms are to eat within a given number of years—that means contempt for good and recklessness in evil."

Night after night, through the slow changes of two moons, did Lavendale watch in the room where he had seen his mother's spirit; but the luminous shape appeared no more, although the mind of the watcher was attuned to the supernatural. He had told no one of the thing which he had seen, not even the Italian, whose researches he had of late been assisting. He found the only distraction from gloomy thoughts in the patient watching of ex-

periments, the ministering service of the laboratory. Here Judith's image haunted him less persistently, here he could for a while forget all things except the secrets of alchemy.

He had heard several times from Durnford, who was in the thick of political strife, and was hand in glove with the Treasurer. Lady Judith had been carried off to Ringwood Abbey as her husband had threatened, and was queening it there over a distinguished party. Durnford had been invited, and had gone there at Lavendale's importunate request. "Tell me that she is not sunk in misery, nor ill-treated by a jealous tyrant," he wrote. "I am agonised by apprehensions of the evil my folly may have brought upon her. The monster of jealousy has been awakened, and by my heedlessness. Should she suffer wrong or contumely, and I not be near to defend her, I should feel that my sacrifice was all in vain—that it would have been better to defy Fate and snatch her to this longing breast. If you will not be my friend in this, if you cannot be my second self and watch and protect her for me, I will not answer for the consequences. I cannot

command my actions should I find that she is wretched. See for yourself that all is well with her, and I shall be at peace."

This, which was not the first adjuration of a like character, impelled Durnford to accept Mr. Topsparkle's pressing invitation, given at the St. James's Coffee House, where the gentleman spent an occasional evening when caprice called him from the country to the town.

"Your hospitality would tempt an anchorite," said Herrick, when Topsparkle grew urgent; "but I know not how her ladyship will receive me. I believe she is at heart a Tory, and that my Whiggish principles inspire her with disgust."

"Pshaw, my dear sir! women know nothing of principles. They believe only in persons and things. Judith is a Tory because my Lord Bolingbroke has the tongue of the first tempter, and would lure all the women in England to his side could he but have their ears as he has Judith's. And then there is Swift, whose magnetic gray eyes and fierce black brows command all womankind to think as he wishes. That fiery spirit was in full sway at Ring-

wood when I left them t'other day, making jingling rhymes about everything, and hectoring and domineering over everybody; all rollicking spirits one hour, all gloom the next. I should never be surprised to hear of that man as a patient in Bedlam."

"He has need for an occasional gloomy fit," said Durnford, "if he ever thinks of the woman who died and the woman who is dying of his cruelty."

"O, fie now! they say he is wondrous civil to Mrs. Johnson, and that if he keeps her somewhat shabbily and has denied her the satisfaction of marriage, he writes her the prettiest letters imaginable in a kind of baby-language which is unintelligible to everybody but themselves."

"If his secret language is anything like his occasional verses it must be exceedingly modest and appropriate for the perusal of a lady," said Durnford.

"O, the Dean has a somewhat libertine fancy, and is mighty outspoken," answered Topsparkle; "but I am told Mrs. Esther can relish a jest, and even pay our modern Rabelais in his own coin.

But you will allow that 'Cadenus and Vanessa,' the poem he wrote in honour of Miss Vanhomrigh, is modesty itself."

"'Tis the most insidious devilish compliment that was ever penned," cried Durnford indignantly. "'Tis sage experienced five-and-forty gloating over the trusting passion of innocent eighteen. I cannot restrain my indignation when I remember that warm-hearted impetuous girl, bold in her ignorance of wrong, whose love he deliberately won and as deliberately slighted when 'twas won. If ever there was murder done on this earth, 'twas Swift's assassination of Miss Vanhomrigh. I had the facts in all their naked cruelty from his bosom friend Sheridan. I cannot admire the genius of a Titan when it is allied with the heart of a savage."

"O, damn it, sir! we must bow to genius wherever we find it," said Topsparkle peevishly; "we have nothing to do with hearts. Swift is the cleverest man in the three kingdoms, and can make or mar a ministry. He dined at Chelsea t'other day, and I am told Sir Robert means to give him the next English bishopric that falls in."

Durnford went to Ringwood, rather to please his friend than for his own pleasure; though it was to his interest as a rising politician to be a guest in a house where there were so many notable people.

To his astonishment Lady Judith received him with smiles, gave him an almost caressing welcome, presented him to her most distinguished visitors, and let them see she wished him to be favoured. However her wounds might rankle, she concealed them completely under that smiling radiant countenance which shed sunlight upon her little world.

> "Ausa et jacentem visere regiam
> Vultu sereno,"

mused Durnford. "She has all Cleopatra's audacious pride as well as Cleopatra's power to charm. I cannot wonder that Lavendale adores her."

He told his friend that he need not be uneasy about his divinity. "So far as seeming can show, her ladyship is happy," he wrote, "and has forgotten her disappointed love. There is no such chameleon as a woman of fashion. I left her a heart-broken Ariadne. I find her as gay as Lady

Lurewell. Ah, my dear Jack, would thou couldst transfer those warm affections of thine to some honourable object, and that I might see thee as happy as I am in my love for Irene !"

There was some comfort for Lavendale in this letter, or at least the assurance that Judith had neither abandoned herself to despair nor was the victim of open tyranny on the part of Mr. Topsparkle. A jealous husband must needs suppress all rancorous feeling in a house full of company, and surrounded by a circle of brilliant friends, Judith would be all-powerful to resist marital oppression, were the gentleman disposed to be cruel. Lavendale argued that if Topsparkle meant mischief he would have secluded his wife altogether from that great world in which she possessed so much influence. He would have carried her off to the Continent, to some baronial castle in Germany, or to his Venetian palace, where she would hear nothing by day or night except the lapping of the water against the stones or the monotonous song of the gondolier. That she was still in the public eye, still the cynosure of such men as Bolingbroke and

Swift, argued that her liberty was in no peril, her life subjugated by no vindictive tyranny.

This was well; but was it well that she could live and be gay without him, that she could surrender the sweet dream they had dreamt, and recover all her old air of happiness, while for him life was so dull a burden, and time one long agony of regret? Was it well that some women should be such light and buoyant creatures, while others break their hearts so easily?

"She was born so," he said to himself; "a beautiful radiant apparition, perfection from top to toe, except for the want of a heart. That organ was omitted in her composition." He tried to distract himself from all such bitter fancies in the laboratory, where Vincenti was delighted to have him for pupil and assistant. Lavendale went to work with new earnestness, and had the air of an adept rather than of a neophyte merely flirting with science.

Vincenti had recovered from that short sharp touch of fever, which had been but the perturbation of the overworked brain acting upon a fragile body.

A few days and nights of rest, so complete as to seem almost suspension of being, had exercised a revivifying effect, and the student looked and moved and spoke with such a renewal of energy that he might fairly be said to appear ten years younger than before his illness.

"I told you that I was on the threshold of success," he said, when Lavendale remarked the change in him; "from the prolongation of life in easy stages by a few years gained now and then, to the prolongation of life into infinity, which shall make the adept immortal, is but a natural sequence; but the day will come when chemistry and Hawksbee's electric machine will abolish death. What is death but the going out of a light? and if we can so contrive that the light shall burn for ever—"

"O, horrible contingency, most hideous possibility!" exclaimed Lavendale. "A world peopled with Wandering Jews—a population of Barbarossas, with minds worn to one dull level in the dismal experiences of centuries; with memories overcharged, hearts dead to all warm affection. If science can

bring about such a universe, science must be an emanation of the devil."

"When you are as old as I am, and the king of terrors is standing at your shoulder, you may be glad of a weapon with which to strike him off," said Vincenti.

"I shall not live to be old, friend. My doom is fixed."

"Why do you say that?"

"A dream—a fancy."

"Trust to neither dream nor fancy. Let me cast your nativity. You have often refused me—for what reason I know not."

"For a very simple one. I have always had a conviction that I was not born to be fortunate or happy; and evil fortune comes with so sure and swift a foot that he would be a fool who would add the needless agony of expectation to the inevitable doom."

"But since you have brooded over a dream, a mere disturbance of the brain, it were better to consult the stars."

"No, Vincenti. For myself I will seek no

further knowledge. 'Tu ne quæsieris, scire nefas, quem mihi, quem tibi, finem Di dederint.' But in this house you may easily discover the hour of my birth, which you have often asked me when we were abroad, and which I had forgotten. The old family Bible is in the next room, and in that I know my father recorded the date and hour of my advent here, as it had been the custom in his family to record all such events, however insignificant in their influence upon the world. If you choose to satisfy your own curiosity—"

"To satisfy my own keen interest in your welfare, you should say, my lord," replied the Italian eagerly. "Yes, if the day and hour are there correctly entered, I will cast your nativity."

"Do so, but breathe not a word to me of the result; I would not be wiser than I am."

"I will be dumb."

"The Bible is with other folios in the lowest shelf on the right hand of the fireplace."

"I will find it."

No more was said upon the subject, but although Lavendale had sternly forbidden the student to tell

him the result of his calculations, the matter haunted him for a long time after their discussion. He looked next day to see if the dust which lay thick upon the top of the folio Bible had been stirred, and he saw that the book had been removed and replaced again. It was altered in position, and set further back in the bookcase than it had been the day before.

After this he found himself wondering when and where Vincenti would trace his horoscope, but for several nights afterwards they were both engaged till daybreak in the progress of experiments which needed much time and patience. It did not seem as if Vincenti were eager for an opportunity to question the stars upon his patron's fate, and Lavendale was inclined to think that the desire to do so had faded out of his mind.

For his own part he was determined to seek no further revelation than that which had been vouchsafed to him, and in which he firmly believed. From his mother's gentle spirit, and from that source alone, would he accept the prophecy of his doom.

"To rejoin her, to be at peace with her, to begin a new life at her knees, to be a little child again, melted to tears at her voice, soothed by the touch of her hand," he thought, "that were indeed to be in heaven. My mind can conceive no higher paradise. I am not attuned to the company of angels and archangels, but I could be superlatively happy in the companionship of a purified being whom I knew and adored on earth, and whose unfading presence would in itself constitute my heaven."

One night when their experiments had been more than usually successful, and Vincenti expanded from his customary reserve, he spoke upon a subject to which he but rarely alluded. That subject was one of which Lavendale was keenly anxious to know more—the experimentalist's past life.

The old man had been speaking of a successful experiment made forty years ago at Venice.

"How near I seemed to the realisation of my boldest dreams at that time!" he exclaimed, in a trance of memory; "what mighty mysteries, what potent secrets seemed within my grasp! yet forty years have gone since then, and my progress has

been by infinitesimal stages! And yet it is progress. I can look back and count the milestones on the road—only it is a long road, Lavendale, a long road!"

There was a silence. Vincenti was deep in thought. Lavendale forbore from any word which could stem the current of memory, for he saw that it was running in the direction of that period in the experimentalist's history about which he was keenly curious—the period of his acquaintance with Vyvyan Topsparkle.

"I had a pupil, too, in those days," he said, "an assistant who was far beyond you in skill, for he had been educated as a chemist; but O, what a villain, what a consummate traitor and scoundrel! How I loved that man, loved him as the incarnation of my own knowledge! I had trained him, I had illumined that quick receptive mind, which was all darkness till I opened the book of occult knowledge before his startled eyes! He had trodden only in beaten tracks, along the level roads of earth, till then. I took him out upon the mountain-tops of science! I set him face to face with the stars!

And he repaid me! Great Ruler of the universe, Thou knowest how that devil turned and rent me!"

"He was the man I have most cause to hate—Vyvyan Topsparkle!" Lavendale cried eagerly, forgetful of everything in his eager curiosity.

"Topsparkle! what do you know of Topsparkle? Ah, I remember. He stole your betrothed."

"No, friend. He did not steal, he bought her," said Lavendale bitterly. "Women of fashion are not stolen. They have their price like other marketable goods; their fathers and mothers are the hucksters. But this pupil of yours—was he not Vyvyan Topsparkle? He has the air of a man who has dabbled in magic."

"Vyvyan Topsparkle never passed the threshold of my laboratory. The man I speak of was his servant and tool, and a darker villain than himself, surpassing him in all things, in cleverness and craft and unscrupulous wickedness. Satan himself, not any other devil in hell, could surpass *him*."

"Do you mean his *âme damnée*, his valet and familiar, Fétis?"

"Yes, Fétis; a man of extraordinary capacity, a

man who might have excelled as a scientific chemist had he been less infamous in character, a man of unbounded talent, who has perverted every gift to the basest uses. I was at once his master and his dupe."

"Tell me all you know of him, and let me help you to your revenge if he ever wronged you," said Lavendale eagerly. "I had good reason for hating the master, but I had no prejudice against the valet; and yet, from the moment I first saw him in a London chocolate-house to the last time he passed me in Topsparkle's hall in Soho Square, I have recoiled instinctively from that sleek waxen-faced Frenchman, as from some noisome vermin, whose worst propensities I only guessed at. I loathe him as I loathe a rat, without knowing why. If he has committed any crime in the past which can be brought home to him in the present let me help to bring about retribution."

"There are crimes not easy to prove. I *know* him to be the vilest of men, the subtle go-between, the corrupter of innocence. I believe him to have been a secret poisoner."

"You think he was concerned in the death of Topsparkle's Italian mistress?"

"I believe him to have been her murderer. He is by far the bolder villain. His master's self-love would have stopped at murder. He would not have risked the gallows even in the white heat of jealousy. He might suggest a crime, but would hardly be bold enough to execute it."

"Tell me all you suspect, and your grounds for suspicion," urged Lavendale; "you know that you can trust me—you know I am your friend."

"The only friend I have had for more than forty years," answered the old man, with a look of extreme tenderness, as if all of humanity that remained in him spoke in those few words. "Yes, you were a friend to old age, and sickness, and poverty, three things which the selfish worldling hates. You, the man of pleasure, turned out of your pathway to succour helplessness, burdened yourself with the fate of a stranger, lengthened out the days which were so nearly done, renewed the almost expiring flame. I owe you all I am and all I hope to be. My success, if it ever come, will be your work."

"Trust me, then; hide nothing from me of that past life of yours with which Vyvyan Topsparkle was associated. You can do me no greater service than to help me to the comprehension of that man's character. I thirst for the knowledge. It can do me no good, perhaps. What can I do to save my love from the master to whom she is sold in bondage? That tie cannot be broken, save by her ruin and disgrace! She must wear her golden fetters to the end. But I want to know—I want to know."

He was speaking in broken sentences, full of passionate excitement, pacing backwards and forwards across the empty space in front of the furnaces. The high wide windows were luminous with the first faint glow of dawn. In that clear light both faces looked wan and haggard; but the face of the pupil was touched with indications of decay which showed not in the wrinkled visage of the master. The face of the young man told of life that had been wasted, health and vigour for ever gone. The face of the old man told only of time and labour, a parchment mask, lighted by the flame of hope and expectancy, keen, intent, watchful.

"I will trust you fully," answered Vincenti, after a long pause. "I have always intended to perpetuate my knowledge of that man's infamy, and of his instrument in baseness, Louis Fétis. If I have trifled with my purpose it has been that I have sacrificed all earthly thoughts to the hope of the discoverer—merged all individual griefs in the anxiety of the searcher after truth. And then I had been told that Topsparkle was in a monastery, doing penance for his wicked life—anticipating Divine Judgment by the scourge and the hair-shirt—and I could afford to let my revenge sleep. But your description of his renewed youth, his insolence of wealth and splendour, his triumph in the possession of a handsome wife and the flattery of the town, was too much for my patience. Yes, that roused the sleeping lion. I have thought of him much since that night—I have thought of her who loved and trusted him."

"She was of your own blood!" exclaimed Lavendale; "I guessed as much even that night when you first spoke of her. You would have scarcely felt a stranger's wrong so keenly."

You were right. She was my granddaughter, my only son's only daughter—the crystallisation of many generations which had been slowly dwindling to a point. She came of one of the good old families of Venice, a race as old as the Medicis, and more honourable, for it was unstained by treachery or crime. Shortly after her father's death, when the memory of that double murder was still fresh in my mind, when grief was still at its keenest period, I wrote out a record of the wicked story, which you shall read."

"At once?"

"Yes, there is no occasion for delay. The paper is in yonder chest, and I can easily find it for you. Read it, and imprint every word upon your memory, and then bring me back the manuscript. I have not yet made up my mind as to its ultimate destination. Vyvyan Topsparkle's guilt is beyond the reach of the law, but I may at least unmask him."

"True," said Lavendale, "the publication of that story would brand him with infamy, and all but the very lowest class of fawners and sycophants must needs fall away from him. But to revive that

half-forgotten slander would be to degrade Lady Judith. As matters now stand she can at least enjoy the price for which she was bought: splendour, luxury, modish society, the consideration of the great world. Take from her those advantages, and she were indeed desolate."

"You blow hot and cold," said Vincenti. "A little while ago you were eager to be revenged upon the man who stole your sweetheart."

"Yes, if I could strike him without injuring her; but reflection tells me that I cannot. Her position as a fine lady is her most vulnerable point. To degrade him were to abase her. But pray let me have your manuscript. I will restore it in an hour, unless it is much longer than I suppose."

"No; it is not a long story," answered Vincenti, going over to an old oak chest which he had filled with books and papers.

The manuscript was in an iron strong-box at the bottom of the chest. Vincenti had to remove a heap of papers before he arrived at the box, which he unlocked with a key that hung on his watch-chain. The manuscript consisted of about half a

quire of letter-paper, closely covered with a small regular penmanship, the ink paled by the passage of years.

"That record was written forty years ago," said Vincenti, as he gave it to Lord Lavendale.

"And you were then old enough to have a grown-up granddaughter," said Lavendale, curious about a subject upon which he had never dared directly to question his friend.

"I was then seventy years of age. You see that however imperfect my knowledge may be, I have at least learnt the secret of prolonging life beyond its ordinary limits."

"You are a wonderful man."

"I have not wasted vital power upon the follies men call pleasure," replied Vincenti calmly, as he went back to his alembic, and concentrated his attention upon the process in hand.

It was in some wise a relief, in some wise a disappointment to the disciple, to discover the exact measure of the master's existence. He had half expected to be told of a life stretching backward into the darkness of past centuries, an existence

that had begun in the age of the earlier experimentalists, while chemistry was still in its infancy; a memory which could recall the living presence of Albertus Magnus or Nicolas Flamel. The years which Vincenti claimed to have lived were beyond the common limit, but were not more than a man of exceptional vigour and exceptional temperance might contrive to enjoy upon this planet, spinning out his thread of life by the careful avoidance of every perilous influence. There was nothing necessarily supernatural in the fact that Vincenti had reached his hundred and tenth year, and had but the appearance of seventy-five.

CHAPTER XII.

"BY FOREIGN HANDS THY DYING EYES WERE CLOSED."

ALONE in his library Lavendale devoured the contents of the manuscript. It was written in Italian, a language he knew perfectly, and in which he often conversed with the adept.

"In the year 1686, being the year before last, I, Nicolino Vincenti, goldsmith, lived at Venice, on the Grand Canal, with my only son Filippo Vincenti, and his only child and most beloved daughter Margharita, a girl of remarkable beauty and as remarkable talent; I may say that she was born with the gift of music, since she gave token of musical genius at so early an age that it seemed rather a reminiscence of the heavenly spheres than knowledge acquired upon earth. She had been educated at a convent, where her gifts had been highly cultivated. She sang better than La Boverina, who was then prima donna at the Venetian

Opera House, and she played the harpsichord with exquisite taste. It was her father's delight to hear her play and sing, his pride and pleasure to watch her growing beauty; and had he been in independent circumstances he would have given his whole life to her companionship; but he had his business as goldsmith and jeweller, upon which he was dependent for the means of life. He had saved a little money, just enough to secure him from an old age of penury; but he was not rich, and never hoped to be rich. He was too much of an artist, too much above the average tradesman in intellect and refinement, ever to make a fortune. He had not the mercantile bent of mind.

"At this time I, Nicolino Vincenti, after practising the goldsmith's craft during the earlier years of manhood, and learning many secrets concerning the properties of precious metals and their meaner alloys, had withdrawn myself altogether from that craft, and devoted all my energies and all my means to experimental chemistry. I had a spacious laboratory upon an upper floor over my son's shop and dwelling-house; and here I spent almost the whole

of my time, having a pallet in a corner where I lay after late watchings, rather than disturb the sleeping household by descending to my bedchamber on the lower floor. Gradually as the years went on I came to live almost entirely in my laboratory, which I only left for an occasional stroll in the twilit streets, or at the importunity of my granddaughter, who would sometimes insist upon my spending an hour in the family sitting-room.

"The all-absorbing researches upon which I had now entered had gradually drifted me away from family life, and almost from natural human interest in my kindred or my fellow-men. I tried to resist the current, and was sometimes horrified at the thought that my heart was gradually hardening itself against those whom I had once loved; but it was in vain that I struggled against the magnetic attraction of the science which absorbed all my hopes and dreams and thoughts. There came a time when my son's voice had a far-away sound, even when he was close at my elbow talking earnestly to me, and when my granddaughter's lovely face was seen dimly like a face in a dream.

"There was but little sympathy between my son and me. He was an artist, a craftsman, whose genius lay in his fingers rather than in his brain. He had no leaning to abstract science, none of the eager curiosity of the discoverer. He was active and energetic, and wanted quick results; was ambitious, but with an ambition which to me seemed narrow and petty. He wanted to excel in the creation of beautiful objects, like Benvenuto Cellini—to be remembered as the maker of drinking-cups and monstrances. But though there was little resemblance in our tastes, there had been much affection between us as father and son, and I had mourned with him when he lost his young wife shortly after the birth of their only child. That child seemed to me the concentrated expression of all the best attributes in a highly-gifted and vanishing race. I could trace every quality and characteristic of her mind and nature to their source in the characters of her ancestry. I found in her all which her father lacked —an ardent sympathy with me in my loftiest aspirations, a yearning for knowledge beyond the narrow boundaries of common life, a profound belief in the

supernatural. I would have given much to be allowed to train her, to make her the confidante and assistant of my labours, as Flamel's wife was to him; but Filippo was narrow-minded and priest-ridden, and he had a pious horror of my laboratory, and of experiments which his ignorance condemned as diabolical.

"Thus deprived of the one sympathiser whose society I should have cherished, my life grew daily more and more apart from that of surrounding humanity, and, absorbing as were the hopes and dreams that led me on from link to link in the chain of occult knowledge, there were yet times when I felt my isolation, and when the silence and gloom of my laboratory weighed heavily upon me.

"It was in vain that I sought relief in the society of the family sitting-room. The air of every-day life oppressed me even worse than the sense of isolation—or I may say that I felt my isolation most keenly when I was among my fellow-men. What I yearned for was not company, but sympathy. The companionship of those who had nothing in common with my pursuits only fatigued and irritated me.

"My one pleasure in the household room was Margharita's singing or playing. There were quaint old sixteenth-century melodies which soothed me with an almost magical power. I have sat in the twilight listening to her with tears streaming down my cheeks. Her voice thrilled and yet calmed my troubled brain.

"My evening walks had but one motive, health. I had long made that a consideration, even when my studies were most enthralling; for I knew that the only way to long life was to husband the oil in the lamp. Every evening, in good or bad weather, I walked about the streets and quays of Venice, and generally ended my promenade by taking a cup of coffee at a respectable resort, where I heard all the news of the city and of the external world. It was not because I was interested in the world outside my laboratory that I listened keenly to the gossip of worldlings, but I was always on the watch for any new discovery or invention that might have some bearing on my pursuits. Science has many branches curiously interwoven, and the scientific world was at this period peculiarly active. I listened to discus-

sions upon all the new facts and new theories which were upon men's tongues in those days—listened while ignorance dogmatised and folly argued, and religiously held my peace. I had no wish to be known as a disputant or an experimentalist. Scarcely half a dozen people in Venice knew of the existence of my laboratory. The Venetians are fonder of pleasure than of science—a gay and idle people, spending their nights in casinos, dividing their energies between the fever of high play and the excitement of secret intrigues; not a people to watch the progress of discovery with any profound interest. They gossiped about Newton and Descartes just in as light a tone as they discussed the last European war or the last revolt in Turkey.

"One evening the conversation was about an English millionaire who had hired a palace on the Canal Reggio, and whose wealth and splendour were the talk of the city. He was young, handsome, elegant, an accomplished musician, and a great linguist. He travelled with a secretary and twenty servants of different nationalities, and had engaged half a dozen gondoliers, and as many more miscel-

laneous attendants, in the city. One of the gossips whispered that, not content with the palace where he lived in an almost royal state and before the public eye, and where he received all the nobility of Venice, the Englishman had imitated our native manners so far as to engage a small suite of apartments in a quiet nook behind the Piazza, so hidden from the public eye that as yet even gossip had not been able to identify the exact position of this secret haven. Rumour asserted that there were days and nights when Mr. Topsparkle disappeared altogether from his palace, and was yet known not to have left the city. These mysterious disappearances might be easily accounted for in Venice, where it is a common thing for a wealthy profligate to provide himself with a secondary and secret establishment whose whereabouts is known only to the initiated.

"I had no interest in hearing of the rich Mr. Topsparkle, and listened with the utmost indifference to those minuter details of his life which the company at the coffee-house discussed with a keen relish, merely because this young man happened to be inordinately rich.

"It was not long after the advent of Mr. Topsparkle, and while the stories about his excellent manners and his worse than doubtful morals were still on every lip, that I met a young Frenchman at the coffee-house, whose conversation, addressed to a person at the next table, at once interested me.

"They were talking of the latest discovery in chemistry, which had been made at Munich by the great Johann Becher; and by the Frenchman's conversation I gathered that he was a good practical chemist, and had an intelligence which went far beyond his actual knowledge. He was just the order of neophyte to interest a worker who longs for some younger mind with which to share his developing ideas. Almost for the first time since I had frequented the coffee-house I joined unasked in the conversation of two strangers. I ventured to correct an assertion of the Frenchman's, and he received my correction with a modesty that delighted me. I enlarged upon the subject, and his interest was so much engaged that he walked with me to my door, listening respectfully to all I could tell him.

"We met again and again. The Frenchman

told me that he had been educated as a chemist and apothecary, but, disliking the beaten tracks of medicine, had given up his profession, and was now maintaining himself by his attendance as secretary upon a travelling gentleman. I was so interested in the young man himself and his aspirations that I was entirely unconcerned as to his employer, and it certainly never occurred to me that he could be in the service of the rich Mr. Topsparkle.

"I asked my new friend his name. 'Louis,' he told me. 'What, Louis only—no surname?'

"He shrugged his shoulders. 'A waif, sir,' he said; 'there are many such in Paris.'

"I was content to accept him as a waif, and to know him only as Louis.

"After meeting him about a dozen times, I invited him to my laboratory, first exacting from him a promise that he should tell no one in Venice of anything that he saw there, or indeed of the existence of such a chamber under my son's roof.

"He came upon many evenings, and sometimes worked with me till daybreak. I was disappointed on finding that his chief interest was in the lower

branches of chemistry—that his ardour for great discoveries was less than my own. He took an ardent delight in the more curious kinds of drugs, whether of a curative or a poisonous nature. He was keenly interested in the secrets of Don Antonio Medici, whose skill in poisons was famous in the early part of the century; and he pored with delight over the records of execution by poison as ordered by the Council of Ten; and in the experiences of Brother John of Ragusa, who suggested to the Tribunal various admirable methods of mysteriously causing death. He had strange theories about the poisons and medicines of the ancient world and of the Middle Ages, and asked my permission to experiment with certain vegetable and mineral poisons upon stray curs and rabbits which he brought secretly to my laboratory. I think it was his callousness to the pain of these animals which first gave me a feeling of revulsion against him.

"One evening, when he left me rather earlier than usual, the door of the family sitting-room was open as I conducted him down-stairs, and he was surprised at the beauty of my granddaughter's voice.

She was seated at her harpsichord, singing an *Agnus Dei*, and he could see her in the lamplight as we passed the door. He pretended to be enraptured by her singing, but was discreet enough to make no remark upon her beauty, which was very striking as she sat with uplifted countenance, her face radiant in the lamplight, her soul looking out of her eyes in a religious ecstasy.

"A week passed after this, in which I saw Louis only on two evenings, during both of which he occupied himself chiefly in his study of toxicology. On one occasion, when I had been particularly disgusted by the tortures he had inflicted upon a helpless cur which he had captured in his evening walk, and upon which he had been trying the effect of small doses of aconite, I taxed him with the brutality and uselessness of his experiments.

"'I grant that the taste is somewhat morbid,' he said; 'but since I have been in Italy I have been studying the history of your Borgias and your Medicis, and I have a philosophical pleasure in imagining their ideas and realising their excitement in little. I can imagine now that this stray cur is

a powerful enemy whose life I am slowly sapping. I can feel as your Italian Catherine, our Queen-mother, felt when her son's frail body wasted slowly under her diabolical arts, to make way for that other son whom she loved so much better.'

"'Such a woman was incapable of love!' I exclaimed; 'she was made up of policy and self-interest, and if she preferred Henry to Charles it was because she thought she could more easily govern France with Henry for her mouthpiece.'

"I was disgusted and angry. The pupil from whom I had hoped much had turned aside from the lofty heights of science to flirt with futilities, to dabble with the petty arts of the barber and the charlatan, the seller of poisoned gloves and poisoned handkerchiefs.

"'It was a pity you did not live in Catherine's time,' I said to him once; 'you would have rivalled Cosme Ruggieri in her favour, and would have made a handsome fortune.'

"'I fear I shall never grow rich by the transmutation of metals,' he answered.

"After this he worked no more at toxicology, and

seemed to resume his interest in my own particular studies. He was a man of remarkable intelligence, and had a specious art of appearing interested, which won my affection and sympathy. I know now that he was an infidel in science as in everything else, and that he only used my laboratory and my knowledge as a means of perfecting himself in the art of secret murder. Whether he studied poisons with the deliberate intent to use them at the first profitable occasion, or whether his dark soul delighted in the power to do evil, without the actual intention of crime, I know not; but I know that before he left my laboratory he had acquired by reading and experiment the most minute knowledge of poisons, and their effects and evidences.

"About a week after that evening upon which Louis had seen my granddaughter at her harpsichord, my son told me with an air of triumph that the rich Mr. Topsparkle, the wealthiest Englishman who had ever visited Venice, had been to his shop, had looked at various examples of his workmanship, and had ordered a covered cup in parcel-gilt, set with agate and lapis-lazuli, after the manner of

Cellini. My son took an artist's delight in the commission, and was almost indifferent to the profit which would be derived from his labour.

"'He is quite a young man,' he told me, 'but he has a wonderful knowledge of the fine arts. I believe he knows every masterpiece of Cellini's; for while we were discussing the form of the cup which I am to make for him he drew at least twenty different forms of cups and covers, all after Cellini, with the most careless pencil. He is an excellent draughtsman, but music, he tells me, is his chief passion.'

"A week later I was told that Mr. Topsparkle, having called to see the progress of his cup, had heard Margharita singing, and had asked to be introduced to the songstress. He had stayed for an hour listening to her, ravished by her talent.

"Had I been a man of the world I should at once have taken alarm, remembering what I had heard in the coffee-house as to the Englishman's character. But I was too completely absorbed in my own studies to be on the alert for any danger that did not menace the secrets of my laboratory. I heard what had happened without being impressed by it.

"After this Mr. Topsparkle was a frequent visitor to my son's sitting-room, but as he never saw my granddaughter alone the most careful father would scarcely conceive the possibility of danger.

"So insidious were the approaches of the seducer, so completely was the father hoodwinked, that the first indication of danger was the fall of a thunderbolt. One evening in late autumn, between sunset and darkness, Margharita disappeared. No one saw her leave the house, but she was gone; and as she never went out alone, but was always escorted by an old servant who had been her mother's nurse as well as her own, her absence created immediate alarm.

"My son was like a man distracted. He searched every public resort, went over the whole city on foot or in a gondola, visited his few friends, hunted every likely and unlikely place for some trace of his lost daughter, but found none. He came to me at ten o'clock in my laboratory, to ask my advice. He was half dead with fatigue, broken down with the agony of apprehension.

"The greatness of this calamity startled me into

an awakened interest in the outer life around me. My sympathy with my son in his distress roused my reason to new action.

"'It must mean one of three things,' I told him: 'accident, suicide, or flight with a lover.'

"'What accident is possible? She could not have fallen out of a window or into the canal without our knowing all about it. Suicide is impossible. Lover she had none.'

"'Are you sure of that?'

"'She was never out of my sight. We have had no visitors—except the Englishman who came to hear her singing.'

"'Then the Englishman is the lover,' I said; and the thought flashed upon me with the force of conviction, 'it is the Englishman who has carried her off.'

"My unhappy son sprang to his feet in a paroxysm of despair.

"'It was I that brought him to her room. I was proud of his admiration of her genius,' he cried; 'I was fooled by his patronage, his art, his liberality, his specious tongue. But her lover—no,

that is impossible. There was no opportunity for love-making. I was always there. The English signor was distant in his politeness; he respected her station and his own. He could not be her lover; I say it is impossible.'

"'Anything is possible to the practised seducer. It is to that man you must look for your daughter's fate.'

"'I will go to his house this instant,' said Filippo.

"'I will go with you.' And then recalling what I had heard at the coffee-house, I said, 'There are two houses which we have to search—the palace on the Canal Reggio, and that secret apartment which I have only heard of from people who knew not the locality. But if there is such an apartment, the scene of secret orgies, hidden infamies, it is for us to find it.'

"We went together, father and son, to the Canal Reggio. It was as I expected. Mr. Topsparkle was denied to us. He had left Venice early in the afternoon, his porter told us, and had gone in his gondola to one of the islands. The porter did not know to which island.

"We forced an entrance into the hall and adjoining rooms. The servants, who were mostly English, gave way before us, and I believe took us for members of the Venetian police upon an official visitation. They at first were inclined to remonstrate, but finally allowed us to go freely from room to room.

"We went through several reception-rooms, all lighted, all empty, and at the end of the suite came to a small doorway curtained with tapestry.

"My son flung back the curtain, and looking across his shoulder into the room I say my neophyte Louis, sitting before a writing-desk, in the light of a powerful lamp. He started up and faced us with a scared look.

"'Scoundrel!' I cried, 'twas you who sent your master in quest of his prey. You were my lord's jackal. Where is my granddaughter? Take me to her without a moment's delay, or I will drag you to the tribunal to answer for the seduction of a Venetian citizen's daughter.'

"I tried to seize him by the throat as I would have done any other dog; but he evaded me, and would have slipped from the room by an inner door,

when my son clutched him by the lapel of his coat, and held him there.

"'What do I know of your daughter, my good Vincenti,' he said lightly, 'except that she sings like a nightingale, and is one of the handsomest women I have seen in Venice? Such a one would count her lovers by the score. Why fix upon Mr. Topsparkle?'

"'There is no one else, and you know it,' I said; 'twas you who sent the seducer to our house. He never came there till you had marked the victim.'

"I then gave him his alternative: to take us straight to his master's secret lodgings, and surprise him there with his victim, or to go with us to the Venetian police. He refused to do either, and told us that the police would laugh at a charge founded upon such slight grounds.

"'The authorities of this city know too much about my master to assail him on such an accusation as yours,' said Fétis. He had his staff of lacqueys at his elbow. Violence would have been useless; so we were obliged to abandon the idea of taking this scoundrel to the head-quarters of the police. But

my son stayed in the hall of the palace while I went to the chief of the police and gave him an account of my granddaughter's disappearance,and my suspicions as to the man who had lured her away.

"I saw at once, by the air with which he heard my complaint, that Mr. Topsparkle had secured the good graces of our timeserving officials, and that I should get no help here. I left the office choking with rage, and wandered about Venice all night, penetrating into the obscurest alleys, watching in doorways for the entrance and exit of mysterious visitors, waiting below lighted windows, listening to the sounds of music and singing, surprising more than one nocturnal orgy and secret rendezvous, but finding no trace of my son's runaway daughter. I went back to the house on the Reggio Canal in the early morning, and found Filippo sitting in the hall. There had been no attempt to drive him out with violence. The servants had laughed at his folly in waiting for their master.

"There is no need to recall every detail of a futile search. For three days and nights my son and I hunted Venice and the neighbouring islands for

traces of the missing girl and her seducer, and the first evidence we came upon was the information of a gondolier who, on the evening of Margharita's flight, had seen Mr. Topsparkle's gondola embark three passengers on a small sailing vessel standing out at sea about a mile from the city. The birds were fled while we were searching for their nest in some secret corner of Venice.

"I went back to my laboratory after hearing this, and took out my granddaughter's horoscope, which I had not looked at since her childhood; I remembered only that the stars had foreboded evil. There were the signs of sudden death in a foreign land; early untimely death.

"I showed my son the result of my calculations, made within an hour of his daughter's birth; and I undertook, old as I was, to follow the fugitives, if it were possible for human intelligence to track them. I urged him to remain in Venice, to be on the spot to receive his lost child should she return to her home, and also to be on the alert for any evidence of Mr. Topsparkle's guilt which time might bring forth. I had travelled much, he but little. It was

agony to me to leave my laboratory, to give up those researches which had daily become more precious to me; but I blamed myself as the indirect cause of my granddaughter's ruin, since it was I who had admitted the traitor Fétis within our doors.

"My son was at first bent on going in pursuit of his daughter, but at last ceded to my arguments, and was content to intrust the task to me. Before starting on my difficult enterprise I tried to discover something more as to the manner of my granddaughter's flight. By close inquiries among our neighbours I found that on the evening of her disappearance two men had been seen waiting about in our street, and that these same men had been seen a little later walking quickly towards the canal with a woman supported between them, almost as if they had been carrying her. Each held her by an arm, my informant observed, and her feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground. But the night was dark, and the three passed so quickly in the darkness that my neighbour was conscious only of something indefinitely strange in the bearing of the three; yet

on reflecting upon it after, he had been horrified at the idea that he might have seen a corpse carried past in this manner, and might have unconsciously witnessed the end of an assassination.

"I was now assured that my granddaughter had been carried away in a fainting and helpless condition, and this idea was speedily confirmed by a discovery which I made in the family sitting-room, where, lying underneath the harpsichord, I found a handkerchief that had been steeped in a solution of an Indian drug, the properties of which I had explained and demonstrated to Fétis. It was a preparation which when smoked or inhaled produces almost immediate giddiness and loss of consciousness; a condition not lasting long, but certainly long enough to allow of the subject being carried quickly for two or three hundred yards. I remembered how minutely Fétis had questioned me about this drug, and how keenly interested he had been in my experiments with it. He had himself smoked a pipe filled with the drug in question, and had calculated the average period of unconsciousness by his own experience.

"I had now no doubt that Margharita had been surprised by Fétis alone at her harpsichord, and had been carried from the house in a state of semi-unconsciousness. A gondola was doubtless ready to receive her at the end of the court, where a flight of steps leads down to the canal.

"I went again to the palace on the Canal Reggio, and was informed that Fétis had left Venice on the previous evening, with all the English servants. The house had a dismantled air, and I was told that it was left in charge of the old steward, who had lived for nearly half a century in the service of the Venetian nobleman from whom Mr. Topsparkle had purchased the property. Topsparkle was not expected to return to Venice until the following autumn. He had gone to Paris, and would go thence to London, where he had a house in a fashionable quarter.

"I followed him to Paris; and there I found him established near the Court end of the town, where my granddaughter lived openly with him and passed as his wife; but as the society in which they lived was the most audaciously debauched in Paris—a

circle of rakes, demireps, and infidels, a society which surpassed in open iniquity the worst phases of Venetian dissipation—the legality of the tie that bound Mr. Topsparkle and his companion was not likely to be questioned. He was inordinately rich, and scattered his money lavishly.

"I made my way into my granddaughter's apartment with considerable difficulty, threatened and all but assaulted by the bodyguard of lacqueys. I reproached her with her cruelty and treachery towards her father and myself, and asked her if she was legally wedded to the man who had carried her off.

"She answered me only with her tears, and we were interrupted by Topsparkle before I could question her further. He drew his sword and would have attacked me, but Margharita threw herself between us and piteously entreated me to leave the house. She declared that she was happy, that she was fondly beloved, that nothing could induce her to abandon her lover. She had learnt the a nguage of that infamous circle in which she had ved, and impudently confessed her dishonour.

"'What bond could be more sacred than that which binds us?' she asked; 'a love that can end only with death. The same passion inspires us both, the same tastes, the same pleasures. We live but for music and love.' She flung herself weeping upon his breast.

"'You see, sir,' he said scornfully, 'she makes no complaint of me; and she does not wish to go back to her father's shop.'

"This was said with infinite contempt, and with an insolent glance at the profligate luxury of the apartment, a kind of Armida Palace calculated to deprave the taste and enervate the mind of its occupants.

"'I am answered, sir,' I replied; 'I shall wait till my granddaughter has awakened from this glittering dream, and has discovered what it is for a woman to become—what you have done her the honour to make her.'

"I left the house, sick at heart. That glimpse of the ruined girl amidst her garish splendour had pained me more than it would have done to find her forsaken and destitute, for then I could have

carried her back to her father a true penitent. I felt, however, that the hour of repentance must come, and I determined to wait for it.

"I was able to pursue my studies in Paris. I had taken a quiet lodging in one of the smaller streets of the Marais, and I passed a great deal of my time at the hospital, where I devoted my days to the study of anatomy, while my evenings were mostly spent in the laboratory of an old man with whom I had studied toxicology forty years before. He had been one of the experts in the Brinvilliers case, and perhaps knew more about the secret poisoners of Paris than any living man. My life under such circumstances was full of interest and occupation; but I never let a day pass without paying a visit to the street where Mr. Topsparkle had his apartment. This was also in the Marais, and not ten minutes' walk from my own obscure lodging.

"I heard the sounds of music and gaiety from those lighted windows night after night, saw visitors enter, saw Margharita pass to her carriage or her sedan-chair, saw all the indications of a life devoted

to pleasure and dissipation. One night I followed the chair to the Opera House, and took my seat in the pit, from which I saw my granddaughter in her box, blazing with diamonds, and one of the loveliest women in the house. My neighbours pointed her out to each other, and talked of her as the rich Englishman's mistress.

"'Is she not his wife?' I asked. My neighbour shrugged his shoulders, and answered as a true Parisian cynic:

"'Wife or mistress is all the same nowadays, except that in some cases the mistress is the more virtuous. Every fine gentleman's wife is some other fine gentleman's mistress; but I believe there is here and there a Miss who is faithful to her protector.'

"This kind of life continued for a little more than four months, and then one morning I found Mr. Topsparkle's splendour melted like a fairy palace and the apartment in the Marais to let. He had gone to London with all his retinue, including Fétis, whom I had met several times in the street and who had tried to make his peace with me. I

had, however, treated all his advances with contempt, and on but one occasion did I stoop to speak to him. This was to accuse him of having carried Margharita away under the influence of the Indian drug, the knowledge of which he had obtained in my laboratory.

"'Do you think drugs were needed?' he asked sneeringly. 'You have seen the lady. If she is a snared bird, you will admit that she is uncommonly fond of her cage.'

"I followed the seducer to London, and found myself a cheap lodging in an alley near St. Martin's Lane, from which den I went forth daily and nightly to keep watch upon my granddaughter's life.

"She reigned to all appearances as sole mistress in the house in Soho Square, but she did not appear in public with Mr. Topsparkle as audaciously as she had appeared in Paris. She was called by his name, but he introduced her nowhere as his wife; and she now seemed to give up all her time to the cultivation of her musical talent, under the tuition of famous masters who attended daily at the house in Soho Square.

"I found, as time went on, that there were some grounds for this seclusion, as she was ere long to become a mother.

"Mr. Topsparkle himself was quite as dissipated in London as he had been in Paris, and spent most of his nights at the chocolate-houses, or in society of an even worse character than was to be found in those resorts. Margharita's life at this period must have been sadly lonely.

"Months elapsed, and I heard one day that she was the mother of a baby girl. I would have given much to have seen mother and child, but dared not trust myself to approach her while she was still impenitent, lest I should say hard things to her. I so hated her seducer that I could not enter his house without the hazard of a quarrel which might end in bloodshed. I contented myself, therefore, with keeping my stealthy watch upon my poor child's life, and obtaining as much knowledge as I could through the servants.

"From them I heard that their lady was unhappy, and devoted to her infant: but only a few days after receiving this information I saw the child carried off

one evening by a buxom countrywoman in a hackney coach.

"My chief informant among the servants, an underling whom I had bribed on several occasions, and who was always serviceable and obliging, told me that the woman was a wet-nurse who was carrying the child to her home in Buckinghamshire, where the infant was to be reared by this rustic foster-mother, as my lady was too delicate to nurse her.

"This I took to be the beginning of sorrow for my deluded granddaughter, and I felt that the time was now at hand when I might lead her back to her duty; but at this very time I was attacked by a fever which laid me up for over a month, and when I was again able to get about a change had come over Margharita's life.

"She had a secret admirer, a young and handsome man, who haunted her footsteps on those rare occasions when she took the air, and who had paid clandestine visits to the house. It was my informant's opinion that although she had openly repulsed this person's advances, and had on one occasion ordered her servants to turn him out of her

house, where he pretended to have followed her under a mistake, supposing her to be a lady of his acquaintance, she was yet secretly inclined to favour him. Her waiting-woman had surprised her in tears on several occasions.

"Mr. Topsparkle had been often absent of late. He had been at Paris and at Newmarket, leaving his mistress to the companionship of her shock dog and her old Italian music-master. She had fretted for the loss of her baby, whom she was not allowed to see, as Mr. Topsparkle hated squallers.

"Apprehending the perils of this present position I forced my way into the house one evening, and found my unhappy granddaughter alone in the midst of her splendour, and as desolate a woman as I had ever looked upon. I urged her to take advantage of Topsparkle's absence, and to leave his house at once and for ever. We would start together next morning, and not stop till she was safe beneath her father's roof. I promised her that there should be not one word of reproach from him or from me. The interval of her sin and her splendour should be forgotten as if it were an ill dream.

"'I cannot forget that I am a mother, and that I have a child whom I love,' she said. 'Those facts cannot be wiped out of my life like a blot of ink off a fair white page. No, I cannot go backward.'

"'And you still adore your seducer; his love can still reconcile you to your infamy?' I asked.

"She hung her head and melted into tears, tears which I believe were the marks of a deep-rooted anguish. She was a being not made for dishonour, and she felt in this moment that she was drifting into deeper shame.

"'You have ceased to love your paramour,' I said sternly.

"'He has ceased to be kind to me,' she faltered.

"'Come,' I said, 'it is time for you to leave him. Your life in this house is beset with peril.'

"It was in vain that I urged her. I was by turns stern and gentle. I promised all that love could offer, I threatened all that my experience could foresee of evil in her present course.

"'You are on the high-road to an abandoned life,' I said; 'between you and the most notorious courtesan in London or Paris there is but the nar-

rowest boundary-line, and so long as you remain in this house you are in hourly danger of passing it. If your own inconstant heart do not betray you, 'tis ten to one your first betrayer will tire of you and pay off old scores by passing you on to his friend.'

"She fell on her knees at my feet in a flood of tears, entreated me to give her time to think of the matter, and if she could find a way of taking her child with her, she would perhaps go with me.

"'Tell me where your child is to be found, and I will look to that part of the business,' I said; and then I discovered that she did not even know the name of the town or village to which her baby had been taken. She knew only that the nurse lived in Buckinghamshire.

"I left her at last, deeply moved—left her, full of anxiety as to her fate. On the threshold of the house I met Fétis, who had his usual air of triumphant malignity masked under a silken courtesy. It was the first time he and I had met in London.

"He asked me where I lodged, how long I had been in town, and whether I was still pursuing my scientific investigations. I told him I had other

investigations on my hands, even more absorbing than those of the laboratory; I had my granddaughter's evil fortunes to guard from further decline.

"'Do you call it evil fortune to be mistress of such a house as this?' he asked, looking round him at the hall in which we were standing.

"'I call it infamy to be the mistress of your master, most of all, his slighted mistress,' I answered.

"'O, fie, sir! we all call the lady his wife. She is known here only as Mrs. Topsparkle.'

"'An empty honour, sir, which the more strongly indicates her dishonour. Did you ever know Mr. Topsparkle introduce his lady to any decent woman, to any persons of standing or repute? No, his only generosity is to surround her with a sybarite luxury, to leave her in a gilded desolation. You all know she is *not* your master's wife, and that no wife would consent to have her child carried off from her by a stranger to a place of which she knows not the name.'

"'My master is a man accustomed to rule,'

answered Fétis. 'We none of us ever presume to thwart him.'

"I passed out of the house without another word, and waited day after day for some sign from Margharita, to whom I had given the address of my lodging; but none came. My illness had weakened me considerably, and I was no longer able to loiter about within sight of Mr. Topsparkle's door for an hour at a time; yet I dragged myself there every evening, and generally contrived to get a word with my ally in the servants' hall.

"One evening at dusk I saw a young man of remarkably handsome appearance leave Mr. Topsparkle's house, as I thought with a stealthy air, hurrying away with anxious glances to right and left, and with the collar of his cloak pulled up about his ears.

"Two days afterwards I saw in the *Flying Post* that there had been a passage of incivilities between the rich Mr. Topsparkle and young Mr. Churchill, a brother of the famous Mrs. Arabella Churchill, the favourite of the late King, a dispute which had nearly resulted in a duel. I went at

once to Soho Square, but was refused admittance. Mrs. Topsparkle was dangerously ill, and her husband was in constant attendance upon her.

"I asked to see Fétis, and, after waiting nearly an hour in the hall, he came to me.

"In reply to my anxious questions he affected to make light of my granddaughter's illness. 'A fit of the spleen,' he said, 'which Mr. Topsparkle's tenderness has exaggerated into a serious malady. One of the Court physicians is now with her.'

"I charged him with deceiving me. 'There has been a quarrel between your master and that unhappy girl,' I said, 'and she is reduced to a state of misery in which you will not allow me to see her.'

"'Quarrel! What should they quarrel about?' he asked, with his unblushing air.

"The physician came down-stairs attended by a couple of lacqueys at this moment, and I went to him at once and questioned him about his patient. He looked astonished at my effrontery, and turned to Fétis for an explanation.

"'I am a near relative of the patient, sir,' I

said, 'and this old heart will break if any ill befalls her.'

"'My good man, the lady is not seriously indisposed. She is but suffering from a languor which is natural to a woman of quality after the ordeal of maternity; and she is somewhat vapourish from the seclusion of convalescence. If she follows my prescriptions implicitly she will soon be restored to good spirits and full beauty.'

"'Then she is not in danger?' I asked.

"'I can perceive none at present. I have attended her Grace of Cleveland for the same malady; and when the Duchess of Portsmouth returned to France she insisted on carrying my prescriptions with her.'

"I had no confidence in an old twaddler of this order, whose gold-headed cane and embroidered velvet suit were apparently his strongest qualifications. I looked from him to Fétis, who, in spite of his silken smoothness, had, I thought, a more anxious air than usual. He was very pale, and his hollow eyes indicated a night of watching.

"'I will not leave this house until I have seen

my granddaughter,' I said, resuming my seat in the hall; whereupon Fétis whispered to the physician, who presently approached me and informed me with a solemn air that although Mrs. Topsparkle's bodily health was in no danger, her spirits were much affected, and that the agitation of an interview with a relative might throw her into a fever.

"Alas, I knew that my presence could not bring calmness to that wounded spirit. Unless she had been well enough to get up and follow me out of that accursed house a meeting between us could be of no avail. I had the physician's word that she was in no danger; and though I put him down as a pompous pretender I yet gave him credit for enough skill and enough honesty to answer such a plain question as I had asked him. So I left the house soon after the doctor, Fétis promising that if his lady were in calmer spirits next day I should be allowed to see her.

"When I went to the house at noon next day she was a corpse. She had gone off suddenly in a fit of hysterics soon after midnight, Mr. Topsparkle and her waiting-woman being present. Mr. Top-

sparkle was shut up in his room in an agony of grief, and would see no one.

"Had there been any medical man called in at the time of her death? I asked. No, there had been no one. It was too sudden; but the physician had been there this morning, and had endeavoured to explain the cause of the death, which had taken him by surprise.

"I asked to see the dead; but this privilege was refused to me. I inquired for Fétis, and was told he had gone out on business, and was not expected back for some hours. The key of the room in which Margharita was lying was in his possession. There were lights burning in the room, but there was no one watching there. There had been no religious ministrations. My granddaughter had perished as the companion of an infidel, surrounded by infidels.

"I sat in the hall for some hours, despite the sneers and incivilities of the servants, waiting for the return of Fétis; but he did not reappear until I was worn out by agitation and fasting and the misery of my position as the mark of insolence from

overfed lackeys. I left the house broken-hearted, and returned there next morning only in time to see the coffin carried to the pompous hearse with its tall plumes and velvet trappings and six Flanders horses. I followed on foot to a graveyard in the neighbourhood, where my granddaughter was buried in a soil crowded with the dead. Topsparkle was not present. He was too ill to attend, I was told; and there were hootings and hissings from the crowd as the funeral procession, with Fétis at its head, went back to Soho Square.

"I followed him to the threshold of his master's house.

"'Do you know why the rabble hooted you?' I asked him, as we stood side by side within the doors, which the porter shut quickly to keep out the crowd.

"'Only because they are rabble, and hate their betters,' he answered.

"'They hooted you because a good many people in this neighbourhood suspect that which I know for a certainty. They suspect you and your master of having murdered that unhappy girl.'

"He called me an idiot and a liar; but I saw

how his face, which had been white to the lips as he passed through the crowd, now changed to a still more ghastly hue.

"'O, you forget that it was I who armed your arsenal of murder. It was in my laboratory you learnt all the arts of the old Italian toxicologists—the poison, and the antidote, and the drug that neutralises the antidote. You were laborious and persevering; you wanted to master the whole science of secret murder. You had no definite views of mischief then, only the thirst for evil, as Satan has, revelling in sin for its own sake, courting iniquity; but you soon found a use for your wicked power. First you snared your victim, and then you killed her—you, the passionless hireling of a profligate master, the venal slave and tool.'

"He made a sign to his underlings—the stalwart porter and three tall footmen—and they came round me and thrust me out of the house, flung me on to the pavement, helpless and exhausted. There was no constable within call; the crowd had dispersed. I had nothing to do but crawl back to my lodging, an impotent worm.

"Next day I was visited by a constable, who told me that I had narrowly escaped being sent to gaol for an assault upon the confidential servant of a gentleman of high position. He warned me of the danger of staying any longer in the town, where I had already made myself an object of suspicion as a foreign spy and a dangerous person.

"I knew something about the interior of London gaols, and had heard so many melancholy stories of the tyranny exercised even upon poor debtors, and how much more upon common felons, that I shuddered at the idea of being clapped into prison and kept there indefinitely by the influence of Mr. Topsparkle. I knew that there was no cell in our dungeons of Venice worse than some of the dens where humanity was lodged in the Fleet, and I knew what the power of wealth can do even in a country which boasts of freedom and equal rights between man and man; so I did not make light of the constable's counsel, but at all hazard to myself I obtained an interview with the Italian consul, who was civil, but could give me no help, and who smiled at suspicions for which I could allege no reasonable ground. The

fact that Fétis had made the art of secret poison his especial study, to this gentleman's mind implied nothing beyond a morbid taste.

"'You are yourself a toxicologist, sir,' he said, "yet I take it you have never poisoned anybody. Pray, what motive could Mr. Topsparkle or his servant have had for making away with a lady who, as she was not a wife, could have been easily provided for?'

"'Revenge. Mr. Topsparkle may have believed that she had been false to him. It is known that he was jealous of her.'

"'And you would suspect a gentleman in Mr. Topsparkle's position, a patron of art, a highly-accomplished person, and a man of society; you would credit such a man with the murderous violence of an Othello.'

"I tried to convince this gentleman that my granddaughter had been poisoned, and that it was his duty to help me to bring the crime to light. I entreated him to use his influence with the magistrate and to get an order for the exhumation of the body; but he thought me, or pretended to think me,

a lunatic, and he warned me that I had better leave England without delay, as I had no obvious business or means of subsistence in this country, where there was a strong prejudice against our countrymen, who were usually taken for Jesuits and spies, a prejudice which had been heightened by the popular dislike of the Queen and her confessor.

"In spite of this advice, I remained in London some time longer, in the hope of obtaining some proof against the wretch I suspected, although the thought of my laboratory drew me to Venice. I questioned my friend in Mr. Topsparkle's household, and bribed him to get what information he could from his fellow-servants; but all I could hear from this source was that Mrs. Topsparkle had been seized with a sudden indisposition late one evening, that an apothecary, whom her waiting-woman called in hurriedly from the neighbourhood, had been able to do nothing to relieve her sufferings, and had been dismissed with contumely by Mr. Topsparkle, who was angry with his lady's woman for having sent for such a person. The sufferer took to her bed, never left it but for her coffin, and Mr. Topsparkle re-

mained in close attendance upon her until the hour of her death.

"I found the apothecary in a shabby street near St. Giles's, and discovered that he had a shrewd suspicion of poison, but was very fearful of committing himself, especially in opposition to the Court physician, who had given a certificate of death. And after many useless efforts I went back to Venice, where I found my son a broken man. He survived his daughter little more than a year.

"This is a truthful account of my granddaughter's elopement and death, which I hope may some day assist in bringing her murderers to shame, if it do not lead to their actual punishment. That she was poisoned by Fétis, with the knowledge and consent of his master, I have never doubted; but such a crime is difficult of proof where the criminal is at once bold and crafty."

Lavendale laid down the manuscript with the conviction that Vincenti's suspicions were but too well founded. There was that in Topsparkle himself which had ever inspired him with an instinctive

aversion, while in Fétis he recognised a still subtler scoundrel. He had heard enough of Mr. Topsparkle's early history to know that he had been notorious for his vices even among the openly vicious, and that such a man should progress from vices to crimes seemed within the limits of probability.

And Judith, the woman Lavendale adored, was in the power of this man, and by her insolent defiance, her attitude of open scorn, might at any hour of her life provoke that evil nature beyond endurance. Hitherto she had made the tyrant her slave; but his jealousy had been aroused, the tiger had shown his claws, and who should say when jealousy might culminate in murder?

"Poor giddy soul, she treats him lightly enough, and has hitherto been mistress of the situation," thought Lavendale; "but she does not know upon what a precipice she is treading. She does not know the man or his true history. And in that house in Soho, where she queens it so gaily, his victim died. There is the atmosphere of crime in the midst of all that splendour. Would to God I could guard her from harm! I might have saved her—might have

carried her off to love and freedom—if I had had a life to give her. But to lure her away on false pretences, to unite her with a vanishing existence, to leave her desolate and dishonoured in a foreign land! That were indeed cruel. And I know that the vision could not deceive. I have accepted my doom."

He wrote to Durnford again, urging him to closer watchfulness.

"You have often told me that you love me, Herrick," he wrote; "you have said that the sympathy between us, engendered of a curious likeness in tastes and disposition, is almost as strong as that mysterious link which unites twin brothers. Think of me now as your brother, and give me all a brother's devotion. Be the guardian angel of her I dare not guard."

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SONS, LIMITED, PRINTERS, PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Form L9–25*m*-9,'47(A5618)444

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

PR
4989
M33m
v.2

Maxwell -
Mohawks.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
AA 000 374 157 6

Delayed Paging

PR
4989
M33m
v.2